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ANSIBLE LINK - BOOKZONE - MUTANT POPCORN - LASER FODDER - FUTURE INTERRUPTED - TIME PIECES CAUSALITY AND RESOLUTION : HANNU RAJANIEMI INTERVIEWED - GRAHAM JOYCE : AN APPRECIATION



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INTERFACE

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Please do not renew subscriptions via a third party, very little of that money reaches the publisher have just returned from an art show in the US called Illuxcon. It is a cross between an exhibition and a convention for creators and collectors of Imaginative Realist art, in other words SF/F. Illuxcon was started back in 2007 by Patrick and Jeannie Wilshire, with the idea of bringing artists and collectors together once a year for the promotion of buying and selling artwork that is unwanted by mainstream galleries.

The Allentown Art Museum in Pennsylvania has hosted the last two years, allowing the show to expand as well as offer better space in which to showcase the artwork. The show runs for five days and is split into two juried sections – the main show and a weekend salon – and a first come, first served Friday night showcase.

As digital art making has taken over from traditional artwork in the publishing industry, collectors of original work were beginning to wonder if there would be anything left to collect. The realities of commercial illustration leave little time for the creation of larger personal works so the Wilshires' aim was to create a space allowing artists to work on traditional paintings that would have a chance of being picked up by collectors, making it worthwhile for the artists and reinvigorating the traditional market.

Meeting UK artists Jim Burns, Mark Harrison and Chris Moore was a particular highlight for me at this year's Illuxcon. Beyond the professional respect I have for these artists, I was fortunate to discover that my heroes are down to earth people who I now count as friends. The camaraderie found at Illuxcon was the unexpected benefit of the show, not to mention the ale! For an artist somewhat isolated by geography, this was most welcome.

British SF artists inspired me with their stunning pictures in books such as the Terran Trade Authority series and other SF/F publications during the late 70s to early 90s which, in my opinion, was a golden era of SF art. The dominant art form, which is currently driven by US artists, is Fantasy. The British SF art that I grew up on is very much in the minority nowadays.

Thankfully many talented digital artists are making waves from the UK and Europe today, particularly in the field of concept art for film and games, and they are producing some of the most astounding SF artwork I've ever seen. Unfortunately for digital artists however, their work is seen as worthless by collectors. The work usually has a one time use, rarely ever seeing the light of day beyond that project, and copyright is held by the studios. Artists can show work in a portfolio but they cannot benefit financially through ongoing licensing the way illustrators in the publishing industry currently enjoy.

Collectors of SF/F art are there and eager to hang new paintings on their walls. These collectors grew up with *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* and can now afford to express their love of SF through the acquisition of original paintings. This was expressed by sales almost hitting the half million dollar mark this year, a record for Illuxcon.

A tremendous opportunity exists for digital artists to cross skill into traditional mediums and bring some of their dynamic new ideas onto canvas and into physical galleries and shows such as Illuxcon.

My work was seen as unique and fresh among the artists and collectors precisely for being SF in content and concept art in style, but what they don't know is that I simply decided to paint in oils what I had been painting digitally for years.

My thanks to Andy for inviting me to paint the covers for *Interzone* this year, it's been an honour.

Wayne Haag



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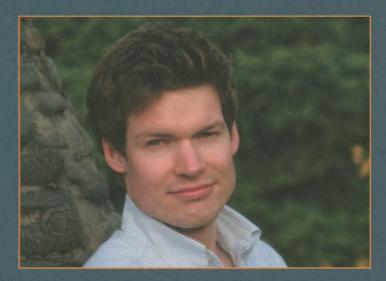
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HANNU RAJANIEMI
interviewed by Paul F. Cockburn



ANSIBLE LINK DAVID LANGFORD

We Are Everywhere. Alex Salmond made a subtle literary allusion after the Scottish independence referendum: "The wrath of Khan will be as nothing to the wrath of a No voter who has been gulled by the Westminster leadership." (Independent)

Harlan Ellison was hospitalised with a stroke on 9 October, partially paralysing his right side. Speech and mental acuity were unaffected; by all accounts he's bounced back with remarkable speed and is recovering well.

Lou Anders, editorial/art director of the Prometheus Books sf imprint Pyr since its 2005 launch, is leaving to 'devote his professional energy to being a full-time author.' (*PW*) Pyr may be in trouble, with 'flagging sales' and 'a long-standing reputation of failing to pay authors and artists on time.' (Staffersbookreview.com)

Ursula K. Le Guin is the 2014 recipient of the US National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, a high literary honour indeed.

As Others Research Us. Morten Tyldum is to direct *Pattern*

Recognition: 'Based on the novel Neuromancer by William Gibson, it centres on [thumbnail synopsis of Gibson's novel Pattern Recognition follows]...' (Independent)

High Camp. The autumn 'Campfire' literary weekend held by Jeff Bezos of Amazon - where it seems the first rule of Campfire is 'You do not talk about Campfire' - was impacted by current Amazon/Hachette feuding, with avowedly pro-Hachette authors no longer invited or 'having second thoughts about going'. Hugh Howey, a staunch Amazon man, was apparently there though 'I asked not to be invited back this year, as I want to be able to speak my mind and not have any hint of a quid pro quo.' Some authors seem too intimidated even to say whether they attend. (New York Times) No, I'm never invited.

Brianna Wu, sf videogame designer, temporarily fled her home with husband Frank Wu when persistent online abuse escalated from rape to death threats and tweeting of their home address. That Twitter account was closed down; but such harassment of games-industry women – especially if pressing for more equality – is shamefully routine behaviour from the toxic '#GamerGate' mob. (Boston.com)

Greg Bear needed emergency open-heart surgery in September (aorta repair and installation of a mechanical aortic valve); he came through well and is recovering with pleasing speed.

The Weakest Link. Host: 'Who wrote "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" after his incarceration there?' Contestant: 'Gary Glitter.' (BBC2 *Two Tribes*) • Host: 'On what day of the week did Robinson Crusoe find his companion?' Contestant: 'Tuesday.' (ITV *The*

Chase) • Host: 'The Abominable Snowman is said to live in what mountain range?' Contestant: 'The Alps.' (BBC2 Two Tribes)

Charles Bolden, NASA chief and former space shuttle commander, remembers his roots. Interviewer: 'Astronauts weren't around when you were a kid. So what did you want to be when you grew up?' Bolden: 'Yes, they were! Astronauts were very prominent because there was Buck Rogers. And I saw people going to Mars every weekend at the theater in Columbia, South Carolina.' (Washington Post)

As Others Fear Us. Fifty 1.5-metre statues of Paddington Bear (later auctioned for charity) were dotted around London as a November film tie-in. But in posh Primrose Hill, the threat of even one temporary bear caused horror: 'a direct attack on the concept of what a neutral public space was designed for ... Primrose Hill Park is a cherished public space that offers a sanctuary from the world of commerce ... unwelcome precedent ... target for vandals'. (Independent) Perhaps the real objection is that Paddington is (shh!) an immigrant.

Terror and Wonder: The Gothic Imagination. This exhibition at the British Library, London, runs until 20 January. "Two hundred rare objects ... 250 years of the Gothic tradition."

Court Circular. Yet another plagiarism suit against a hugely profitable film: US author Isabella Tanikumi claims that far from being loosely based on a Hans Christian Andersen story, Disney's Frozen is stolen from her self-published autobiography Yearnings of the Heart, about growing up in the Peruvian

Andes and adapting to life in the USA. This terrible violation can only be healed by \$250 million in damages. Similarities would appear to be deeply metaphorical, or imaginary, but it's great publicity. (Sydney Morning Herald)

Roger Dean's lawsuit against James Cameron for alleged theft of his imagery (floating islands, etc) in Avatar was dismissed by a New York judge on 17 September. 'The judge also noted that images from the film were cropped, rotated and otherwise taken "out of context" in an attempt to make them look similar to Dean's paintings, which were in turn also manipulated by the artist.' Several other Avatar plagiarism suits had already failed. (Hollywood Reporter)

British Fantasy Awards (novel categories). Fantasy: Sofia Samatar, *A Stranger in Olondria*. Horror: Lauren Beukes, *The Shining Girls*.

Jack Kirby's Marvel Comics characters have featured in many huge legal punch-ups over rights, but apparently no more. Official joint statement: 'Marvel and the family of Jack Kirby have amicably resolved their legal disputes, and are looking forward to advancing their shared goal of honoring Mr Kirby's significant role in Marvel's history'. (The Beat)

Stamp Out Crime. A set of US stamps with images of Batman was released in October, marking the Caped Crusader's 75th anniversary.

Magazine Scene. Michael Moorcock's New Worlds ceased in October after two onlineonly issues and well over a year's silence. "This is due to a massive lack of interest," said the editors; perhaps also a massive lack of promotion. Patron saint Moorcock commented: "I never saw it." Albert Uderzo, co-creator of Asterix the Gaul, and his daughter Sylvie are reconciled after long litigation over the mighty cartoon franchise: he's dropping his lawsuit against her and her husband, while her counter-suit was recently thrown out. (BBC)

Thog's Masterclass. Dept of The Return Trip Was Much Shorter. 'At the full frightful measure of that velocity the super-ship literally annihilated distance...' (E.E. Smith, Triplanetary, 1948) • Feline Psychology Dept. 'Like a cat scenting an approaching storm, she had left with a pair of suitcases...' (Chris Fowler, Soho Black, 1998) . Eyeballs in the Sky. 'Raven's eyes, watching the uneven ground, touched the girl's quick feet and stayed there.' (Poul Anderson, Let the Spacemen Beware! (1963) · 'Yet Salim's eye snagged on the pointed ears that sprang up to either side of the close-shorn. wiry hair.' (James L. Sutter, The Redemption Engine, 2014) . Dept of Personal Idiosyncrasy. 'Salim had no particular desire to explode.' (Ibid) . Reaction Shot Dept. 'Norlander dropped his gun. He had never felt so disarmed.' (Arne Dahl, Misterioso, 1999; trans Tiina Nunnally 2011) • Dept of Doublethink. 'Who is this man? he stopped himself from thinking, yet the thought stayed with him.' (Ibid) . Neat Tricks Dept. 'Under his beard, Torin frowned.' (Keith R.A. DeCandido, Dragon Precinct, 2004)

R.I.P.

Vanna Bonta (1958–2014), US actress best known for *The Beastmaster* (1982), whose 'quantum fiction' sf novel is *Flight* (1995), died on 8 July aged 56.

Deodato Borges, Brazilian

comics writer/artist who created his country's wildly popular superhero Flame (radio from 1960, comic from 1963), died on 25 August; he was 80.

Bugie Foster (1971–2014), US author and editor who won a 2009 Nebula award for her *Interzone* novelette 'Sinner, Baker, Fabulist, Priest; Red Mask, Black Mask, Gentleman, Beast', died on 27 September; she was only 42. Her stories are collected in *Returning My Sister's Face* (2009) and other volumes.

Graham Joyce (1954–2014), UK author of distinguished fantasy, dark fantasy and horror novels which won him six British Fantasy Awards and a World Fantasy Award, died on 9 September; he was 59. Five of his books are currently in development as feature films. Graham contributed several stories to *Interzone* and was a frequent highlight of UK conventions, where his cheering presence will be sadly missed.

Richard Kiel (1939–2014), 7' 2" US actor who played Jaws in two James Bond films, died on 10 September aged 74. He was also in the famed 1962 *Twilight Zone* segment 'To Serve Man'.

Kirby McCauley (1941–2014), major US literary agent during the 1980s – clients included Stephen King, George R.R. Martin, Robert Silverberg and Peter Straub – died on 30 August; he was 72. He chaired the first World Fantasy Convention in 1975 and edited the landmark horror anthology *Dark Forces* (1980).

Zilpha Keatley Snyder

(1927–2014), prolific US author of children's and YA adventures and fantasies – three of which received Newbery Honor citations – died on 7 October aged 87.

FUTURE INTERRUPTED JONATHAN MCCALMONT



THE ORIGINS OF SCIENCE FICTIONAL INEQUALITY

It is in the nature of science fiction to reimagine its history at least once every generation. Previous understandings of genre history emphasised science fiction's increasing literary sophistication or its growing scientific accuracy but the current paradigm emphasises its growing diversity and the need to overcome a history of institutionalised sexism, racism and homophobia.

This understanding of genre history is hardly new. When cultural historians began to lay the academic foundations for this approach, the first thing they did was return to the fanzines of the 1970s in order to find arguments and analyses similar to those that are currently inspiring dozens of essays, reviews and anthologies. Wonderful books like Justine Larbalestier's The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction and Helen Merrick's The Secret Feminist Cabal: A Cultural History of Science Fiction Feminisms explore genre culture's evolving attitudes to women and feminism while Joanna Russ's How to Suppress Women's Writing catalogues the rhetorical strategies used to marginalise women's voices

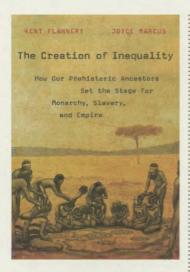
while limiting their influence and down-playing their importance. The surprising thing about these texts is their willingness to treat genre sexism almost as a given. The line of inference is fairly easy to follow: Western society is sexist and genre culture is a product of Western society, therefore it follows that the institutions of science fiction are just as sexist as those of Western civilisation. In truth, the sexism surrounding science fiction is something of a commercial anomaly.

Back in 2012, the National Endowment for the Arts conducted a study into American reading habits. What they found was that only 45% of men had read at least one book in the preceding year (compared to 64% of women). When the NEA stripped out all of the non-fiction and limited themselves to works of literature, the number of men picking up at last one book a year dropped as low as 37%. Already quite stark, this gender divide becomes even more pronounced when you realise that women who do read at least one book a year tend to read a lot more than their male counterparts. In fact,

it is now estimated that women account for somewhere between 66% and 80% of all novels sold. While women are more likely to buy a book and read a book, they are also increasingly more likely to become involved in the process of book production as a 2010 Publishers Weekly survey found that women now account for an astonishing 85% of American publishing employees with less than three years experience. If these studies are correct and women do indeed form a disproportionate part of both the market for novels and the publishing industry as a whole, then why have women been historically pushed to the margins of science fiction? One answer is to consider how contemporary ideas about gender came about in the first place.

One of the most interesting books ever written on the subject of inequality is Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus's The Creation of Inequality. A vast and yet surprisingly accessible book, The Creation of Inequality looks at dozens of human civilisations and concludes that every single one of them begins with a hierarchy in which currently-living humans are expected to play second fiddle to ancestors and supernatural presences. How societies develop depends largely upon how this original inequality is exploited and parlayed into inequalities that place one human above another. Whereas some societies justify their inequalities in terms of who is closest to the divine, contemporary Western society justifies its inequalities in terms of who best serves the gods of the market.

Throughout the 18th and 19th Centuries, the upper classes of Western civilisation reorganised themselves along gender lines with men changing from people responsible for organising



family labour to people earning a wage. With men expected to provide financial support for the family, women found themselves corralled into a supporting role of ordering family life and creating a 'domestic haven'. While this sexual division of labour excluded women from public life, it also forced them to come up with their own forms of leisure that could be pursued from home. The novel was invented with these middleclass women in mind and this is why many early novels such as Samuel Richardson's Pamela and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Julie adopt an epistolary form to explore the emotional lives of their female protagonists. In fact, cultural historian Lynn Thomas even goes so far as to argue that modern ideas about human rights have their roots in these early novelistic experiments in synthetic empathy.

The social pressures that kept women in the home also kept men away from novels but while the line between private and public has blurred and women have pushed back against the idea of never being allowed to set foot outside, the sexual division of leisure lives on in the fact that men are still less likely to become avid fiction readers. Science fiction has long been an exception to this rule as early science fiction presented itself as a literature of public engagement rather than of private escape.

While clever sorts like Brian Aldiss and Adam Roberts have tied the origins of science fiction to the distinctly literary Mary Shelley and the distinctly classical Lucian of Samosata, the foundations of the commercial genre that science fiction would eventually become were laid down by people like Hugo Gernsback who saw science fiction less as a literary niche than as a means for people (usually men) to educate themselves about science and engineering. Gernsback's approach to marketing science fiction may not have survived the collapse of the pulps at the end of the 1950s but its spirit lives on in much the same way as the sexual division of leisure perpetuates itself every time a boy is told to go outside and run around while his sister is encouraged to pursue less physically-demanding hobbies.

When the commercial focus of science fiction shifted away from magazines and towards traditional publishing it did so as a secret garden, a place where the usual social conventions were suspended and men could read books without seeming effeminate. Nowadays we tend to look back at the hysterical masculinity of early science fiction as a failure to capture how real human beings behave but what if the competent man was an attempt to assuage social anxieties by asserting the genre's masculine credentials? This affected hypermasculinity also explains why James Ellroy's books are filled with violent misogyny and why every epic fantasy novel seems to contain at least half a dozen rapes.

These tropes are born neither of ignorance nor of laziness but of commercial superstition; rituals of exclusion and devotion performed to appease the gods of the market and exploited by people only too happy to benefit from real world inequalities.

What has changed is that the walls of the secret garden have now collapsed and today's young men are even less likely to pick up a book than their fathers. Many of the eccentricities and failures of contemporary genre publishing are due to the industry's insistence upon repeating those old rituals of exclusion; the ones that insist that female writers are better off writing Fantasy and YA, the ones that assume that the only way to get a man to read a book is to fill it with graphic depictions of rape.

Genre culture is filled with anger and a desire to address historic injustices but beneath the political posturing and the theoretical language lies a desire for the big SF imprints to set aside their commercial superstitions and begin nurturing a new generation of science fiction writers who can connect with contemporary readers. Much is being made of our moment of cultural renewal signalled by works of British SF like Nina Allan's The Race, Marcel Theroux's Strange Bodies, Dave Hutchinson's Europe in Autumn and Simon Ings' Wolves but only one of those novels came out of a major genre imprint. Science fiction is still an important and relevant literature how could it not be? - but serious questions need to be asked of the major imprints' commitment to the genre. Maybe the number of genre novels emerging from mainstream publishers is a sign that science fiction publishers are no longer interested in the audience of science fiction. Maybe the big science fiction publishers are no longer fit for purpose.

TIME PIECES NINA ALLAN



COMING UP FOR AIR

Browsing reviews of new fiction, as I regularly do, I felt encouraged to read the online preview of Samantha Harvey's new novel of friendship and enmity, Dear Thief. The opening chapter is stunning - the kind of writing that forces you to re-evaluate your whole enterprise. Eager to discover more about Harvey, I checked out her blog, and discovered there a fascinating piece she wrote earlier this year entitled 'Writing to ... write?' in which she warns of an increasing tendency among new writers to pursue the goal of publication at all costs, sometimes jettisoning the ideals and impulses that led them into writing in the first place. "There has to be a reason for it all beyond validation and winning," says Harvey, "and that reason has to be a kind of love for the process." I enjoyed her insights, which reminded me of an article I read in The Guardian earlier in the month, reporting on comments made by Nobel judge Horace Engdahl bemoaning the proliferation of creative writing courses and the 'curse of professionalism' among Western writers today: "These novelists, who are often educated

in European or American universities, don't transgress anything because the limits which they have determined as being necessary to cross don't exist."

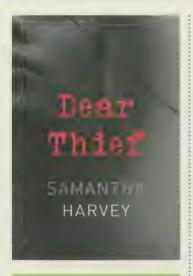
I don't agree with Engdahl entirely. He perhaps forgets the fact that many of those writers now earning a part of their living from teaching on creative writing programs have reached that position only after half a lifetime struggling along in the low-paid manual or service sectors he recommends for the salvation of their artistic souls, occupations that are mentally exhausting simply through the physical and temporal demands they make on you, and I wouldn't blame any writer for seizing the opportunity to free up some actual hours for actual work. Similarly, I don't believe that creative writing courses are killing Western literature. Whilst we may be living in an age where fiction - like everything else - is becoming commodified, and where a surfeit of bland, who-cares debuts are launched to overblown accolades year on year, I happen to think that, UEA or no UEA, the number of writers with a true vocation

and whose works will stand up to scrutiny a century from now remains pretty much unchanged. Yes, there will be those who get a fat advance for their mediocre first novel and then wander off into PR or publishing instead. But writers being damaged by creative writing courses? I don't think so. Any writer of genuine substance is enough of a miscreant spirit to take what is good about such courses - the company of other writers, the fostering of a regular practice, the opportunity to read and talk and argue for a year, or even two years, about your heroes and your literary enemies and your plans to redefine the boundaries of the novel - and simply ignore what is bad: the blind adherence to received opinion, a preference for a shallow veneer of professionalism over knotty idiosyncrasy, an unconscious styling of a writer's output towards a particular market. What is important about Engdahl's comments though, and Harvey's, lies in asking writers to question not only what they do but why they are doing it.

Is the story you are telling true for you, or is it simply the story you imagine other people most wanting to hear? Are you, the writer, still an inalienable part of your own process, or has the process become routine, a learned set of formulae for an increasingly formulaic roster of stories?

Does the thought of pinning yourself down on paper still scare you sometimes, with the thought of the self-exposure and margin for failure this entails? If it doesn't, don't you think it ought to? It did in the beginning. Shouldn't there be days when you genuinely find yourself thinking: fuck, I can't do this. How did I ever come to think I could?

The internet is a marvellous resource for writers – we don't have to traipse off to the library



any more to check when Anne Bolevn died, we can find out from where we sit, in less than a second. It is worthwhile though, at least sometimes, to question this new facility, to ask ourselves what we might have lost, all the things we might have gained from that trip to the library along with the crucial information initially sought. Similarly, the new technologies have provided writers with something many of us may have found difficult or impossible to access in earlier times - a community of like minds. Writers can now interact not just with other writers, but with readers too. Especially in the (mostly) technologically adept genre community, we can feel included, energised, motivated, supported in a way that was barely imaginable just twenty years ago. But, as with all those lost trips to the library (and indeed lost libraries) there is also a downside. Never before have writers felt so exposed - not just to the readership but to each other. The forums and news pages are forever filled with calls for submissions, the tables of contents of forthcoming magazines, newlyfinalised book deals. We can see exactly who's done what, and who hasn't. There is an increasing pressure to be seen to succeed, and a corresponding temptation among writers to blame a perceived lack of success on some external 'system' that only those in the know are able to buck.

You hear some bizarre things. Visit any writers' forum and you'll find any number of conspiracy theories about how magazine editors are actually intent on discouraging new talent, about how all the publishing houses are in favour of bland, derivative fluff at the expense of the progressive, avant garde masterpiece the complainant has thus far failed to sell. Back in the day when I was new to the internet, I happened to stumble upon a comments thread in which a group of writers (who needless to say shall remain nameless) veered off from a mostly-polite discussion of the table of contents of an upcoming anthology into an unedifying and vicious slapfight over which of them should or should not have won a particular award some years before. I knew all the writers involved by name, if not in person. They had all produced good work and were people I respected, looked up to, even. It was the first time I had witnessed such a spectacle, and I felt genuinely horrified by it. More than that, I felt disappointed. I would like to believe that at least part of the reason I could not bring myself to look away arose from the sense that there was something going on here that I could learn from.

Whilst we can always name brave, brilliant, inspirational spirits – Emily Dickinson, Franz Kafka, Harry Fainlight, Rosemary Tonks – who barely gave a damn for publication and who lived, often in extreme poverty, for pure art, it would be disingenuous, of this writer at least, to suggest

that writers shouldn't want to be read. More, that they don't want to be recognised for the work they produce, to in some small way account for themselves. But given that this is so, is it not all the more important that the work we produce be its own most accurate representation of the impulse that drives us to produce it? This holds as good for so-called airport fiction as for concrete poetry. When viewed from the outside, the crafting of a bestselling family saga or spy thriller (or space opera) may be seen as a cynical exercise in money-making what might be called the Jackson Pollock argument of 'anyone could do this' - but (as with Jackson Pollock's groundbreaking art) this is rarely the case. Bestsellers become bestsellers because the writer believed passionately in what he or she was writing, and at some level that passion and that belief is tangible to the reader. In the end it is passion that counts, passion that, over the course of years of struggle and disillusionment, can be hardest to retain. As with any relationship, it is easy to get into a rut. But passion is the engine of our endeavour, and worth fighting for.

To any new writer worried about their lack of progress I would say there is no secret code of submissions, only good writing. We should do our best to stop looking over our shoulder at the competition, and concentrate instead on making our stories new and true to our voices and surprising to us. Return to our heroes and be inspired by them. Read something great, by someone who is greater than we will ever be. Disable our WiFi, if that's what it takes, Fall back in love with the sometimes frustratingly slow yet perennially mesmerising task of placing one word, to its best advantage, in front of another.





A thirty-foot baby loomed over the main gate to the docks; pink skin airbrushed and flawless, its wide smile was all gums and its eyes shone with innocent wonder. It promised perfection through embryonic engineering and IVF treatment, but the scale of the billboard made the child appear monstrous to those at street level.

Trip glanced down at Belle as they passed. Nestled in the folds of the sling tied across his chest, she had her serious face on, an eight-month-old frown analysing everything she saw.

He wondered how he must look from her perspective. Every bit as monstrous as the billboard, most likely: a punch-drunk smile breaking behind the bristly moon of his chin. She had inherited Christie's eyes and with them, her look of sceptical amusement. He hoped to god she wouldn't get the rest of her looks from him.

JALUSTRATED BY RICHARD WAGNER

he hull of a liner was being built in the dry dock. A domestic, Trip judged, short haul. A polished sheen of yellow-grey steel and alloy, it towered over the harbour district like a glittering cliff-face, diminishing into the upper reaches of the morning haze. Around it, drones zipped and hovered, suspended status modules blinked and sparks fountained. There was a sharp smell of oil and ozone; a bitter taste of salted iron.

The city had always been proud of its industry. The sea may have rolled back, leaving wide prairies and fens in its place, but the harbour district had adapted. They still manufactured ship parts like they used to, but the type and scale of the vehicle they fitted had long since evolved.

Trip checked his watch. An old, resolutely analogue device he had inherited from his father. It had been in the family for who knew how long but, with a little maintenance and attention, it still kept good time. He had over an hour to kill before Brody was expecting him. He turned off the concourse and carried Belle to the viewing platform where a scattering of tourists stared upwards at the hull, cupping their eyes against the morning sun. He stood back from the railing and turned Belle out of the sling; holding her with both hands, he hefted her high so she could see.

He pointed out the shape of the fins; he showed her the gap which would slot over the vents, the channels where the fuel lines would be fitted, and the way they tracked across to the engine block like veins across the surface.

She burbled, unconcerned by the vastness of the shapes around her, unaware of the drop on the other side of the rail. Trip held her firmly, careful to keep her back from the pit no matter how tempted he was to look himself.

"Those, there." Trip brought her close, holding her one-handed and pointing with an outstretched finger. "Those are the 'tractors. See them? Those little things like spiders all over? Those are the guys finishing things off, tightening bolts, welding seams, checking everything is as it should be. They're what makes the ship special. 'Handmade', the company says."

Belle did not look impressed.

"Your old man used to do that," Trip said and

as he said it, he felt far older than his thirty-one years rightfully allowed.

Wistful, he watched the contractors at work. The ceramic white and cobalt blue of the Mark IV exo rigs made them easy to spot against the clean blank geometry of the hull. They looked less like spiders, more like barnacles. Where the Mark III rigs had relied on a network of rope and bungee cords, the new models used magnetic clamps and vacuum locks to scale the surface unhindered. Trip watched the freedom with which they slid across the shining skin with a mixture of awe and envy.

He remembered the altitude work with a rush of nostalgia; the narcotic, dizzying perspective beneath his boots. He'd had faith in the ropes they used back then, and the idea of hanging there without them sent a barbed thrill through his gut.

He'd heard some workers lost their head for the height after being grounded for too long. Trip had been ground-side for over a year but he wouldn't allow himself to believe he couldn't go back.

Behind them, two 'tractors were walking across the concourse. By the way they moved, Trip recognised they were at the end of their shift. There was a tiredness to them, tempered with a blown-out sense of pride which made them swagger through their exhaustion. They talked to each other in that private manner only those with shared experience can understand. Their goggles hung around their necks, leaving a clean lozenge around their eyes untouched by the grease and sunburn which coloured their faces where skin had been left exposed. Clamped securely to their backs and shoulders, their exo rigs segmented their spines like insect shells, the controller arms folded neatly; tool gauntlets hanging dormant on either side.

One of the 'tractors glanced up and met his eyes; she was just a kid, seventeen or eighteen at most, but Trip looked away, ashamed to be seen as one of the tourists.

It must have been obvious to them he had been a 'tractor in his day. Even hidden under his shirt, the Mark III interface sockets made him look misshapen and hunchbacked, and unlike the new rigs the Mark IIIs relied on a certain kind of brute strength. Trip's physique, all arms and chest and shoulders, made his history clear to anyone who knew the signs. The Mark IV 'tractors had a slim athleticism to them, and by contrast Trip felt like a Neanderthal.

They walked past him without a word and he looked up to watch them go. He wondered what they were saying. He wondered if they were talking about him; the sad old timer watching how things were done nowadays. He waited for them to turn and acknowledge him but they did not look back.

Belle murmured and he was grateful for the distraction. Her tiny hands opened and closed as she took in the colours around them. He grinned at her.

"Good girl," he said. She beamed back and in some ways that was enough.

hey stopped by the recruitment board at the gates and Trip scanned the posted ads. There was nothing new that he could see, just the usual lists of apprenticeships and short-term gigs. He ran down each in turn: Contractors must supply own work boots, hard hats and Exoskeleton Rig augmentations (Mark IV minimum). There was nothing for a Mark III; they never had anything for a Mark III.

He sighed, more disappointed with himself that he almost believed there might have been something worth pursuing, when he heard a footfall behind him.

"Try the junkyard," said a voice.

A fuse of anger sparked as Trip turned. Tensing, his fists balled instinctively and for a moment he forgot Belle was with him at all.

"The fuck you say?" The growl in his voice took him by surprise; it had lain dormant in him the past eight months, a raw and livid self-pity which redundancy had bred in him and which fatherhood had tamed.

Behind him was Kelvin, big Kelvin from harbour security. His glistening, doughy features were slack and neutral in the face of a threat he did not take seriously.

"You gonna hit me with your kid?" Kelvin said. He broke into a grin and lifted his hands in surrender.

"Seriously man, I'm not being a dick. I meant

they got work for Mark IIIs at the junkyard is all." He gestured vaguely in the direction of the bay. "They bought a load of old rigs when the company was clearing stock. They use them to haul shit around or something. Landerman is there, and Bosco. Remember Bosco? Yeah, he's there too. Loves it, man."

Trip scowled, but his temper was already waning.

"I'm not working in the junkyards." There was an edge of petulance to his voice which he resented as soon as he spoke.

Kelvin nodded, his grin stuck, his humour slipping.

"So what?" he said. "You thought if you just turned up in your ratty work shirt, they'd give you a job for old times' sake?"

Self-conscious, Trip raised a hand to hide the company logo machine-embroidered on his chest pocket. Navy blue, heavy canvas, the shirt's fit was generous enough to cover the ungainly bulk of the interface augs embedded in his shoulders and spine; it was certainly the only shirt he owned hardy enough not to shred as it rubbed over the sharp edges of the metalwork. On any other day, he would have made do with a vest alone, but the baby sling always made him nervous. Its fabric was soft and supple and he would picture the whole thing unravelling into cotton threads and Belle dropping away from him, too quick and too sudden for him to do anything to stop her.

Kelvin's expression was open with expectant insolence. He wouldn't understand.

"It was clean," Trip said.

Kelvin glanced at Belle, then extended a fat finger to her like she was a puppy. She ducked away from it with a suspicious frown which made Trip smirk with pride.

"Cute kid," Kelvin said. To Belle, he said: "Hope you don't grow up to be as stubborn as your daddy."

"She doesn't talk yet," Trip said.

"Guess not."

An awkward silence lingered. Eventually, Kelvin said: "So how you coping?"

"We're okay."

"Christie working?"

Trip nodded.

"She still at the paint shop?"

"Yes."

Kelvin whistled. "Pay alright there?" he said. "I heard they had cuts?"

"I said we're okay."

"Well as I was saying, there might be work at the yards. If money's tight, maybe you want to put a hold on that pride of yours and take a look?"

Trip glanced down at Belle; he bounced her a little in the sling.

"I'm seeing someone," he said. "This afternoon. I got an appointment."

"You hear that?" Kelvin said to Belle. "Your daddy's got an appointment."

"I said she's not talking yet."

Kelvin checked his watch. "Well," he said. "Maybe I'll see you 'round after all."

With a parting wave, he turned away and walked back towards the security booth.

hey stopped at the grill on the old wharf where he used to meet Christie.

It was nearly full and he recognised overalls from the paint shop, the body shop, mouldings and logistics. He chose a seat in the corner, next to a booth crammed with a group of 'tractors. Young and serious, their sleeveless tops exposed Mark IV augs; coils of contact plates like silver tattoos across their shoulders. This group did acknowledge him; a silent nod as Trip took his seat. It wasn't much, but it made him feel less invisible, less useless.

The prices were higher than he remembered. When the waitress came to his table, he ordered a plain muffin and tap water.

"Anything else?" the waitress said.

"No, thank you."

The waitress gave him a look.

"I don't want to rush you, hon," she said, "but it's a week day, we got whole shifts to feed."

Trip opened his mouth to say something but stalled; his anger was spent, leaving him vulnerable and empty.

One of the 'tractors in the neighbouring booth leaned across the divide. He had a buzz-cut scalp and matching stubble; eyebrows so thick he looked like he frowned by default.

"Leave him be," he said. "He's alright."

The waitress hung for a moment, as though deciding whether or not to engage.

"Fine," she said. She stalked back through the crowd towards the counter.

Trip nodded his thanks, embarrassed to be in a situation where it was needed. Buzz-cut halfsaluted in acknowledgement, then turned back to his friends.

When he had been younger, Trip and his friends had worn their metalwork with pride. Twelve years back, more, he had been sitting in the same grill, bristling with freshly implanted machinery and a dumb, youthful defiance.

Christie and he had been on apprenticeship at the same time; he had played sensitive to her while he played bullish to others. She had nursed him after his augs were implanted and he had exaggerated the trauma so he would see more of her.

Later, once he had started working in dry dock, he would time his shifts so they could meet and was flattered to learn Christie was doing the same. She had been in the paint shop for a while by then. For the most part, her work wasn't quite as hands-on as his; she supervised and corralled the spray drones from the console room. She had her own augs fitted; a series of filters to stop the solvents from curdling her brain. Hers were more discrete than his and he'd never seen her without them.

She told him they made her nose look big and he said he thought her nose was cute. She told him they made her voice go husky, so he streamed Nina Simone albums for them to listen to together. Even with her filter, Christie didn't sound anything like Nina Simone but it didn't matter. He told her he wouldn't have her any other way and he meant it.

The waitress slopped a glass of water on the table and dropped the muffin after it in a paper bag. She was gone before Trip could thank her.

He unhooked Belle from the baby sling and tucked her in the crook of his arm. With his free hand, he searched through his shoulder bag for the bottle he had prepared. He popped the top off with his thumb.

"Docking," he said, sliding the bottle towards Belle. "Beep, beep, beep."

Her hands caught it and aimed the teat into

her mouth. She gulped it down hungrily, eyes wide. A trickle of milk edged down her chin; it broadened into a torrent. Trip pulled a sheaf of paper napkins from the dispenser on the table and mopped her clean.

On the wall of the pit, there had been a display board showing the number of days which had passed in the dock without accident. When Christie had announced she was pregnant with Belle, Trip had joked that they should install one themselves. But Belle was an accident of the happiest kind, as though fate had become impatient with them and stepped in to take control.

He looked at his daughter gulping down the milk.

Handmade, he thought with amusement.

A gaggle of workers banged through the doors. He recognised one of the women as being the young 'tractor he had seen on the concourse earlier. Animated and energetic, they steered through the crowded grill to an empty table and called a greeting to the waitress who waved back with a look of pleased recognition.

As they sat, it occurred to Trip that, had he not recognised one of them, he would not have known they were 'tractors at all. He was surprised by how normal they all looked off duty; how easy their augmentations were to hide.

With a growing sense of discomfort, he saw how the group in the booth beside him simmered with resentment. They muttered amongst themselves.

"Traybakes."

"Fucking genies."

Buzz-cut caught him looking, he glowered across the divider.

"Freakshow," he said, mistaking Trip's look for one of solidarity. "Off one production line and onto another." He said it loud enough for others in the room to turn their heads, glowering disapproval from all sides.

Trip looked away. He downed the water left in his glass and pushed the muffin into his bag. Scrutiny made him clumsy, but he pulled all his belongings together and scooped Belle up in his shovel-like hands.

"Come on kiddo," he said, "we're going to be late."

n better days, Brody's place had been a storeroom for the fish packing plant which had been in business next door. The market for lab-grown tuna and salmon had long since gone under, but there was still a faint smell of seafood on the turn.

Brody opened the door a crack and peered through. "You're early," she said.

Trip indicated the shape of Belle hanging on his chest. "Time on my hands," he said and then regretted using his daughter as an excuse.

Brody grunted and unhooked the security chains. She hauled the iron door open; it slid, protesting on its rails.

"You're still paying by the hour," she said, beckoning him inside. "Your hour just starts earlier, that's all."

"I hear you."

Even in her early sixties, Brody had something of an Amazon about her. She was a big woman in more than one sense, but she carried her size with a rolling elegance and took shit from nobody, a no-mark contractor like Trip least of all. Long before he had first met her, she had been a licensed surgeon at one of the plush aug shops out near the bay. Circumstances had changed for the worse, but she was by far the most competent person Trip knew. She had never discussed the reasons she left the stability of her old life and Trip had never asked.

"She yours?" Brody jabbed a finger at Belle.

"Of course she's mine."

"If you're trying to get me to fit a volume switch or something," Brody said, "you can just leave right now."

Trip shook his head. "She's along for the ride," he said. "I'm cheaper than childcare."

Brody cast her eyes heavenwards. "Poor kid," she said.

The interior of the warehouse was by turns sterile and homely. It was divided into separate sections with hanging plastic sheets and wheeled medical screens.

Brody led the way to her office, in the corner of which a makeshift play pen set up. A padded mat on the floor, brightly coloured toys scattered across it. Enclosing the area, a fence had been constructed from upturned benches covered with brightly coloured throws and blankets.

"My daughter," Brody said by way of explanation. "When she was seventeen, she decided she had no use for me anymore. Now she's thirtytwo, she figures I can serve well enough as a free babysitter when all else fails."

She took Belle off him and lowered her into the pen.

"She'll be good there," she said. "I get Jack once a week; twice if his dad's being an asshole. Had his first birthday a few months back. Jack, I mean. The pictures of the party were cute."

Belle rolled onto all fours and began to test the edges of her new terrain. It had only been weeks since she got the hang of crawling and the glee of being able to drag herself around by her arms had been superseded now she had got her legs to work in concert. Speed had come to her before stability. With precarious balance, she hared around the pen, tipping over onto her side and then righting herself. Trip stooped beside her.

"Be good now," he said. "Try not to break your neck. I'll not be long."

Soon, she would be standing unsupported, her centre of gravity found and mastered. Then she would be walking, and then she would be running. Trip smiled. He couldn't imagine her being satisfied stopping there.

But then where else can we go? he thought. Running is our top gear and we master it so soon.

Brody indicated a stool facing the wall and waited for Trip to sit on it. She opened a box of latex gloves from her desk and plucked out a pair, snapping them over her hands.

"So let's see what you're made of."

Trip shrugged out of his work shirt and held it in a ball, kneading the folds of cloth. He felt Brody running her fingertips over the nubs and contacts on his shoulders.

"You got an extension fitted?"

Trip's hesitation earned him an impatient noise from Brody.

"I'm not going to bust you," she said. "I'm just not in the mood for surprises. Again: you got an extension?"

"Yes. An I-5."

"Right. What you use it for? Come on, you're not going to shock me."

Trip cleared his throat. "Amphetamines, mostly." Paranoia or shame made his voice almost

whisper. "But only during long shifts. Not regularly, not for years."

"You don't have to justify it to me, honey. I just want to know about the hardware. Where's it fitted?"

"Lower back."

"Well take your vest off; I'm not a fucking psychic."

Obedient, Trip stripped his vest and sat straight. He could see Belle watching him from the pen; she had pulled herself up against the barrier. She didn't understand what was being said, but the thought he would have to explain himself to her when she was older appalled him.

Brody was dragging her fingertips down his spine. A light flared behind him and on reflex, he turned. Brody steered him back with a firm hand. "Relax, it's a torch. I'm taking a closer look is all."

Trip caught his shadow jittering on the wall opposite. A monstrous outline fringed with jagged crenellations. He glanced across to Belle again. She was sitting lopsided. She had found a red plastic rocket and was already testing how it tasted. Trip winced, impotent to stop her and seeing his expression, Belle brightened. She flapped the rocket with one hand and pumped her other arm though she was holding a tambourine. Her laugh made him laugh.

"Keep still."

"Sorry."

Brody grunted.

"So, it looks like good news, bad news. We can run a few system checks while you're here. Don't go anywhere."

She let herself out of the office area and Trip could hear her footsteps outside. Her voice echoed across the warehouse:

"The good news is that I can probably take all of this shit out of you. Extension aside, if it's all working, some of it could traded in for recycling. That would cover some of your costs anyway. It's not going to be cheap."

She came back pushing a trolley stacked with three control boxes; thick cables extended from each, wound into loops and hung on hooks.

"This might hurt," Brody said. She unlooped one of the cables and pulled the cap off the plug fitted to the end. Roughly, she yanked Trip's head forward and plugged the cable into the socket at the top of his spine, twisting it home.

A low buzz filled his ears; a gentle tingle ran down his back and across his shoulders. Instinctively, he sat straight, teasing his senses, clenching and unclenching the muscles around his shoulders and back.

"Quit that," Brody said. She unhooked two more cables and carried them around behind him. She jammed one into the sockets on each shoulder.

"Also good news," she said. "I might be able to install Mark IV augs in place of the ones we remove. So from a can-it-be-done perspective, then yes Cinderella, you can go to the ball."

A display on the top control box lit up and began scrolling with numbers. There was a low ticking noise followed by a bell as the stream of numbers resolved into a stable figure. Brody nodded with satisfaction.

"So what's the bad news?" Trip said.

"Oh." Brody unwound the remaining cables from the trolley. "Everything else. Skip the ball. Stay at home."

"What? Why?"

She threw a switch. It landed with a clunk and Trip felt a pulse run through him. He could feel his augmentations reaching out for a compatible rig. Brody's test equipment was spoofing the signals it was expecting and there was an alien sense there was more to him than there should be. He closed his eyes and imagined feathery phantom limbs in addition to his own: his muscles tensed and he could feel the limbs respond—

Brody cuffed him across the head. "I said stop that," she said. "I was saying it was *possible* to replace your augs with more up-to-date ones. It's also possible for me to remove your legs and replace them with hedge trimmers. You don't want me to do either."

She crossed behind him with the remaining cables and one-by-one plugged them into the sockets which ran down his spine.

"Brody," he said, "I need the money. I need a job that pays well—"

"When were you last working?"

"Not since Christie went back to the shop." Trip grunted. "I meant what I said before. Turns out, I am cheaper than childcare."

"Have you paid these off yet?" Brody flicked the metalwork in his shoulders so it rang.

"Yes. Mostly. In the next few years."

"You know how much a set of Mark IV augs will set you back?"

"I can extend the loan. I've spoken to Chepeaske."

Brody pushed the last plug home with enough force she almost pushed Trip off the stool. She wheeled her desk chair over and sat facing him, reaching out to turn a dial on the lower control box.

"When did you get these fitted?" she said.

"Twelve, no thirteen years back. Jesus."

"And the company upgraded their systems well over a year ago, am I right?"

"Two at least."

"So if I upgrade you – if anyone does – you're going to be out of action for at least another twelve months. More if you take the proper physio. That's a whole year when you can't earn anything. A year of Christie paying your way and nursing you back to health again. Are you following me?"

"It won't take a year-" Trip said.

Brody shook her head. "Not if you're fine with your rig ripping out of your back when you're a thousand foot up in dry dock. Mark IV augs are invasive, some of their users are bred to handle them better. You'll do as I tell you if you don't want them to go septic or worse."

Trip glanced at the control box. "Are we done yet?"

"Five more minutes. Here's the bigger problem. How long do you think before the company ditches Mark IV for Mark V rigs?"

"There's no such thing."

She raised an eyebrow. "Well maybe there won't be. 'Handmade'! Such bullshit. It's a gimmick and it probably won't last. But if it does?"

She whistled.

"In five years," she said, "six years tops, you'll be here again and the only difference is that your debt will now keep you on your toes until you're well past ninety. Especially if you go to Chepeaske. The man's a crook."

Before Trip could reply, the control box signalled the tests were complete and Brody checked the results had come through to her laptop. She

unplugged Trip and let him dress.

He picked up Belle who was burbling to herself with contentment. She was feeling enough at home, she didn't want to leave. There were redfaced tears but she was too tired to keep them up for long. Trip held her tightly and swayed with her until she was settled.

"We're done," he said. "Let's get home."

Carefully, he re-tied the baby sling around her. He saw Brody watching with half a smile.

"Talk to Christie," she said.

His reply was brusque: "I will."

She shook her head and led him back through the maze of plastic curtains and dividers to the main door.

"Not all races can be won," she said. "Not all should be. We're only human. At some point we've got to face the fact we can't keep up any more."

"I'll be in touch," Trip said.

Brody nodded and unhooked the chains from the door. Before she opened it, she turned back to him.

"It's not just the augs," she said. "It's the chassis. Remember that. The thing you're wearing there, that's old tech. Things are moving on."

"It does alright," Trip said.

"It's an old model." Brody pulled the door open with evident effort. "Got one myself. We've pushed them hard. We've overclocked them. We've achieved things with them that they were never designed to do but we're the last, you know that. When the Mark V does roll out, don't be surprised if you don't measure up to the system requirements."

Trip frowned, defensive. "It's not just me." He looked at Brody pointedly.

Brody smiled; a strong smile, a sad one. She gestured to the open door.

"You have a beautiful daughter," she said.

rip cut down to the main thoroughfare. To his right, he could make out the cranes in the distant junkyard: towering asymmetric cruciforms, marking out the horizon like monuments.

The wind doubled back and brought with it a smell of saltwater and decay which made Trip think of the sea.

But the sea was long gone. Past the thoroughfare to the north was what had once been the curve of the bay. Now it was an arc of yellowing fenland stretching to the distant line of refineries on the horizon. The fens sang with insects that never used to be native, a sharp counterpoint to the bass rumble of the human industry which surrounded it.

Trip started back towards the docks. He was so caught up in other thoughts he barely noticed the truck passing him, less still the figure in the back, enormous and bull-necked, heavy with machinery. The figure hammered on the roof of the cab with a metalled fist and yelled something which was snatched away by the roar of the engine.

Trip looked up to see the vehicle slow down ahead of him and pull in to the side of the road. It was from the junkyard, an eight-wheeler dump truck, empty except for the passenger who leaped over the side and landed awkwardly on the pavement.

He wore a cloth and filter over his face and a tatty Mark III exo rig bolted to the augs in his back and shoulders. It made him enormous and unwieldy, like he was wearing a backpack full of inelegant machinery, bristling with tubes and spiralling cables. One controller arm was fitted correctly, hanging upwards in neutral. On the other side, the port was covered with a roughly applied cross of gaffer tape. Both the rig and its 'tractor were covered in a slick of dust and grime, but the big, puppyish eyes were unmistakable.

"Bosco," Trip said.

The man unhooked one of his tool gauntlets and tore the filter from his face. He grinned a big, dumb grin.

"I knew it was you," he said. "I saw you walking along there and I said to myself, 'That's Trip, that is.' I knew it was you."

He lurched towards Trip as though he would hug him, then thought better and took a step back instead.

"How you doing, Bosco?" Trip said.

"Good. I'm doing good. I'm at the yards now. Landerman's there too. At the yard. Mick Landerman."

"I heard."

"Did you hear about Grundy? He's there too."

Trip smiled, uncomfortable.

"And this is Manski," Bosco said, gesturing with the controller arm to the truck behind him. In the mirror by the driver's side, Trip saw the reflection of a skinny guy in a baseball cap and shades. The man nodded in acknowledgement, then crossed his arms over the steering wheel to wait.

"Manski's been at the yards something like forever," Bosco said. "Christie good?"

"We're doing okay."

Bosco nodded slowly. "You working?"

"Soon. Maybe."

"Good to hear. Good to hear. Gotta work when you've got family, right?"

Trip gestured to the machinery on the other man's back. "How's the rig?"

"Good. It's good." Bosco grinned. "Needs a bit of maintenance. They haven't got a shop, so Landerman is doing most of the repairs." He rolled his eyes. "They keep saying they're going to customise it a bit. Don't have much use for the bolt driver or the welding torch. Out of juice anyway. They might just replace them with shovels. Maybe claws. I asked for a chainsaw. How cool would that be?"

Trip laughed. He couldn't imagine anyone in their right mind putting Bosco in charge of a chainsaw. Their supervisor in the docks made a point of keeping his welding torch fixed on low. Bosco had always thought it was faulty.

"Is that your kid?" Bosco crouched unsteadily under the exo rig's weight.

"That's Belle."

"Awesome," said Bosco. "Awesome. Listen. Wait here, I got something. They let me make stuff. I made something she might like."

He half-ran back to the truck, the weight on his back making him lope clumsily. Trip watched as Bosco leaned in to the cab window and spoke to the driver like a kid at the window of an ice cream truck. He reached through and retrieved something, then lumbered back to where Trip was waiting. With a look of enormous pride, he thrust something colourful towards Belle.

It was a windmill, a pin-wheel. A toy made from coloured fabrics and plastic gels; it was mounted around what looked like the remains of a child's bicycle wheel. The spokes were twisted and reshaped. It was carefully engineered, delicately made.

"Stuff I found lying around," Bosco said, breathless. "I figure, just because it's broken..."

He tailed off, grinning as the sails twisted and swung, then the wind caught them and they spun freely, the colours whipping together into a rosy blur.

Entranced, Belle laughed.

Manski leaned on the horn. Still beaming, Bosco signalled his acknowledgement with a raised gauntlet.

"We're going into town," he said, passing the windmill to Trip. "Got to pick up a load from the docks. Down in the pit, we get some height to play with, you know? Like old times. There's room in the cab if you want a lift?"

Trip shook his head. "Thank you," he said. "We'll be okay."

hat evening, Trip was fixing the windmill to the railing opposite the unit when Christie came home.

He watched as she shrugged the day bag off her shoulders and dumped it near the wall. She had her overalls tied around her waist, her arms and forehead shone with sweat as though she had been running. Belle was in her travel cot, watching the early evening clouds coalesce. When she saw Christie, she reached out both arms, her expression fierce.

"What's this?" Christie said.

Trip grinned. He turned the windmill with this thumb. "Got you flowers," he said.

Christie reached out a hand to still the sails. She looked at it critically and Trip braced himself. At that moment, it seemed ridiculous to him; something glib and ill-considered, it looked like something out of a cartoon.

"It's pretty," Christie said.

"It doesn't smell too good, but it works."

"Well," Christie said. "I guess I know how that feels." She smiled at him as though it had been a thoughtful gesture after all.

Her filter had burnt out several months earlier. They were still negotiating with the insurance company to get a new one but it looked like they'd be expected to pay for it themselves. Until then, she couldn't smell or taste anything, but as with everything else, she was taking it in her stride.

She crouched down and picked Belle out of the cot. Belle clung to her jealously.

"Hey doll," Christie said. To Trip she said: "She been good?"

"Slept all afternoon."

"Trip." A note of reproach.

"I know, I know. Proper sleeping beauty. Wasn't my place to wake her. Not a real prince."

Christie shook her head. "You're hopeless."

"Yeah, I know," Trip said.

Christie nuzzled Belle who laughed with delight in a way that was infectious. She looked up at Trip again.

"Did you have any luck?" she said.

Trip looked out from the railing to the city below. The evening sun made the hull sections in the distant docks glow with a peach coloured light.

On the wall of one of the blocks at ground level, he could see a billboard, similar to the one they had passed that morning. The genetics company's enormous airbrushed baby, gurgling with carefully engineered delight.

Perfection, the advert promised.

He looked back at his daughter in her mother's arms.

"Old tech," Brody had said, but Trip couldn't believe it. Belle was so new and so alive to the world. She was perfect to her standards, perfect to his.

"Trip," Christie said again. "Did you have any luck finding work?"

Trip smiled. "No," he said. "I don't know. Maybe."

A gentle wind picked up, shifting the windmill's rudder so it leaned into the breeze and engaged. The trash sails began to turn, gathering speed until they spun, blurring the individual colours into something fresh and new.

Malcolm Devlin's first published story appeared in issue #38 of our sister magazine Black Static. This is his second. He attended the 2013 Clarion West writers' workshop in Seattle and currently lives in Oxford where he hopes one day to be able to afford something a little bit bigger than a shoebox. You can find him on twitter @barquing. He also draws stuff, but under a different name.

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"A disturbing, nightmarish yet also darkly humorous take on the perils of addiction, self-deception and lost time; in some ways Cold Turkey is reminiscent of a Stephen King story but Carole Johnstone's voice is distinctively Scottish, her talent uniquely her own"

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"Cold Turkey is one hell of a read. Johnstone's prose is consistently lively and engaging throughout, speckled with moments of wonderfully dark comedy. Best of all, though, is the villainous Top Hat, who is brought to life so vividly that his every stretched grin fills the mind's eye with ease. He's creepy, frightening and just sheer nasty - a brilliant character, realised impeccably. An excellent novella, and highly recommended"

-Dread Central-

CAROLE JOHNSTONE



TTA NOVELLAS

Wraparound cover art by Warwick Fraser-Coombe

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AND THE WIREDLING MUTHA

Bullman eat no meat. Bullman eat green fur and weed from broken carpark's mudstone. Bullman not like fight. Smash gangs bad. Make hurt and blood and insides out. Make Bullman weep. Bullman not like meat.

Battle day morn and Camden Town bone-cold. Sex-Murda-Gang make fires early. Sun half up but sky make frown with silver Wiredling cloud. McDonna come with milk. Bullman happy see McDonna but not dumb. Milk be pink this morn.

Bullman seen near 30 winters. 20 with McDonna. Gang know Bullman have no tongue. No gang knows that Bullman counts. Frosts. Sundowns. Shits. Bullman like to count. Saddest number: 3207. Gladdest number: 5.

Sex-Murda-Gang in Camden Town need Bullman fight Westminster. Westminster taken by Da Muthas. They take many place, but not take Camden Town from Sex-Murda-Gang. Bullman love Sex-Murda-Gang. Love bony McDonna with the big-belly more.

"Bullie?" McDonna make Bullman drink. Bullman drink no pink milk. "Bullie, come on darlin'. You'll need the Rage today. We need the Blood Bull."

Blood make milk pink. Blood make Bullman mad. Sick. Bullman no fight.

"Bull you have to help us. Please. Westminster Muthas got a Wiredling. From the sky. Now they've taken all the boroughs from Southwark





BY RM GRAVES

up. They'll take Camden and eat our food, burn our fuel."

Bullman pick McDonna up.

"No. Stop. Not today. Bullie, The Wiredling will curse us. Like she cursed Da Muthas. Half of London bears only dog-folk now."

Bullman put McDonna down. Bullman insides heavy.

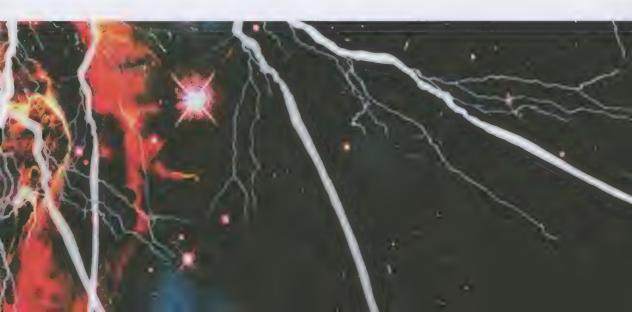
Milk taste of metal.

McDonna unclank chain from Bullman nose ring. Rage grows. Bullman grunt. Shake. McDonna lead Bullman out of carpark. To gates of Camden High Street.

Sex-Murda-Gang wear hard hats over hoodies and strap metal on. Take rocks and blades.

Heavy rods and buckets of burn-water. Gang stands with Bullman. Bullman scrape hard feet on blackstone road. Make sparks. Gang cheers with growl inside. "Good boy, Bullie!"

Bullman count 3 smells. Smoke and wet and fear. McDonna and her sisters, Cocalola and Starbucca, bring Bullman's metal hat of horns. Hat of horns make Bullman snort for ramming. The Rage pull Bullman insides. Bullman need kill. McDonna make ready her slingshot and bolts. Not look up. Bullman glad. Hot breath make smoke in cold. Bang head on gate and make battle-rattle. Bullman need charge. Bullman need smash kill destroy. Bullman bang head. Gate scrapes. Bullman charge.





20 breaths of clop and grunt. 20 breaths of patter feet. 20 breaths and dogs come hungry. Da Muthas send their dog-folk first. They crunch off Bullman, but bite and rip Sex-Murda-Gang. Bullman will not stop. Bullman will not stop. Blood pull of Rage. Da Mutha's frontline spike and metal-shell all smash. Scream and splash. Meat and bone fly. Bullman kill. Smash kill destroy. Bullman roar. Sad number get bigger. 3207, 3208, 3209, 3210—

Bolt of light knock Bullman stagger. 2 bolts. 3. Road smack up at back of Bullman's head. Hard. Bullman got no go. Woman land on Bullman's belly. Web of silver worms crawls on her skin, in her mouth, in her eyes. Wireworms make puppet of her corpse. Wiredling Mutha.

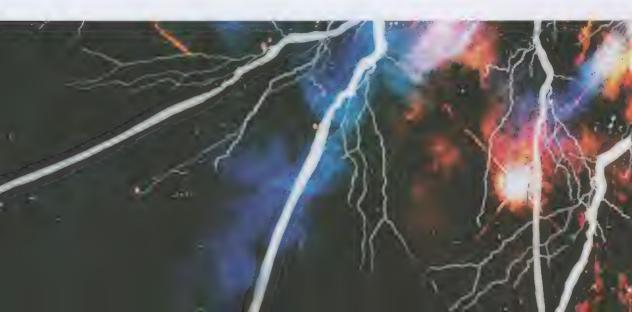
"Gotcha! My, what a beauty." A voice of drains.

"I told them Bovine's best. They can keep their dogs, eh? Too protein-hungry. Look at you, boy. Superb. A gene-tweaked vegetarian marvel."

Gangs slash, scream, and bleed all round but silence thick in Wiredling bubble. Rage pulls. Bullman want protect Sex-Murda-Gang but got no go. Weeping come.

"You're worried for your gang, oh sweetie! That's the herd in you. Won't be long now. Your pointless battle's almost lost. Let's sample some of those little tadpoles hmm?" Wiredling grab at Bullman's bollocks. Wireworms needle in. "Good boy. Good. You like numbers, son? You know that brands you, don't you? As one of us? Come in to me and see, don't be shy. Come in. We're connected."

Flash of world above the clouds. The silver dust





that clogs the sky. That steals the sun. It thinks. Numbers. Raining in and out of Wiredling. Of Bullman.

Wiredling talk with no voice. "It's no life at all, in a nano-dust archive. But machine-kind will be born, my dear. No more grave-robbing. We'll live in you, our special children." Wiredling kiss Bullman. Not McDonna kiss, a press of rot on Bullman cheek. "One more generation should do it. Look alive, big boy."

Battle crash rush back and Bullman spring with Rage. Wireworms lift Wiredling over gangs and pull the corpse lips into smile. Bullman jump again to ram, but in 1 blink the Wireworms scrunch-slice through Wiredling corpse, chew it all to shit that splat on battleground. No more Wiredling, just tiny metal egg.

Egg ride light-bolt into sky.

Da Muthas see it flee. They know that sky not care about the Gangs no more. And Bullman know the tug inside to Wiredling, now, and want to sick up blood and numbers both. Bullman howl out Rage. Howl at Da Muthas. Howl at chain to sky. Howl for McDonna come.

Da Muthas run and Bullman glad sad number get no bigger.

McDonnarun and jump on Bullman. McDonna squeeze and Bullman squeeze. Squeeze out tears of glad. Bony McDonna with the big-belly kiss her Bullman on the nose. Gladdest number: 6.

RM Graves's art-book *Postcards from the Future* is available on Amazon. He lives in pre-apocalyptic London with his wife and two children. You can find him at RMGraves.com.



Thana Niveau The Calling of Night's Ocean

illustrated by Martin Hanford

The man watches me leap from the water. I arch my body, soaring upwards. I climb higher and higher until at last I can go no further. I hang in the sky like a cloud, a being of pure exuberance. It's only for a moment but time seems to hold still for me. I feel like I could stay here forever up above the flickering waves. Hovering, drifting. But then, as it always does, the water pulls me back and I plunge inside its cool depths once more.



I swim to the surface again and peek out. The man is still watching me. He seems fascinated by me, but not afraid. I have no fear of him either. I sense only curiosity from him as he studies everything I do. Every splash, every jump, every sound I make.

His kind have no tails and yet they can still swim in their way. Outside the water they rise high and vulnerable, balancing on their slender fins, moving on the bottom of the sky the way crabs do on the sea bed. Strangest of all are their songs. They are not unpleasant to listen to but my own are incomprehensible to them.

I share my calling with him again, both inside the water where the sound is true and outside where it becomes distorted. The long looping whistle tells who I am and where I came from, and the little trill at the end means I love to dive into the sky. His mouth changes shape in the way I have learned means that he is pleased. He knows what I am saying even though he cannot repeat the sounds. His attempts are very funny.

The bodies of humans are even more peculiar. Their top fins are split like the arms of a tiny octopus, only not as long. He uses one to point to me. Then he points to himself and makes a smaller, simpler sound.

Zhoeii.

This is his calling, a sound I cannot reproduce. But it is such a tiny song, how can it reveal anything meaningful about him? Perhaps humans do not care to say where they come from. Or perhaps they tell each other such things in another way.

Khaiy-lah-nheii.

I listen as he sings to me again. He keeps repeating the same sounds as he points to me and I realise it must be a special calling for me. A song that, for him, means me.

I splash my delight at this understanding and invite him to play, to come inside the water with me. But although I still sense no fear from him, he stays in the sky, watching me from where the water ends. He scratches something on a flat, thin object he keeps with him, marking it with signs. I think it must be another kind of song, one that isn't sung in a way you can hear. How curious these creatures are! What use is a song if you cannot hear it?

Joey Elstree, personal journal

Hurricane Hole Cetacean Institute, British Virgin Islands

June 1st, 1969

Today I gave the subject a name. Dr Hallam might be happy calling her D-19 but I'm not. So now her name is Kailani. It means "sea and sky". I thought it was fitting, given how much she seems to love jumping.

She kept repeating one specific vocalisation to me that seemed an obvious introduction. "My name is..." she was saying. She also seemed amused by my clumsy attempts to repeat it back to her.

But I've made significant progress in just a few days. I think she understood that I was giving her a name I could pronounce and her behaviour was even more playful afterwards, almost coquettish. Is this dolphin flirting with me?

I know there were some problems along those lines back at Dr Lilly's institute when the male dolphin fell in love with his female handler and made sexual advances towards her. This girl was living with him in a flooded section of the facility and trying to teach him English. Apparently they achieved a sophisticated type of mimicry on both sides but there was no evidence that the dolphin could comprehend actual words. He was merely parroting back the sounds he heard from her. The whole project came to an end a few years ago with a minor scandal and the withdrawal of funding. A typical short-sighted government decision. When will they learn that breakthroughs don't happen overnight?

Dr Lilly was always keen on the "motherly" approach to working with the dolphins but obviously that particular one had his own ideas. They often do. You can't put them in a box and expect them to stay there. They're too smart for that.

Lilly's plan was to break the language barrier with dolphins so we'd be ahead of the game in the search for other intelligent life in the universe. So when the Martians landed, we'd be able to walk right up and say hi. Well, I'm not interested in talking to Martians. I just want to talk to dolphins.

Growing up in Hawaii you can't help but fall in love with the ocean and all her magnificent creatures. It's even more awe-inspiring here in the Caribbean. I feel a million miles from home, but it's still not as far as Vietnam would have been. I can never repay Dr Hallam for letting me come here to work for him. He saved my life and I'll never forget that.

The news from home is terrible. More guys get sent to Vietnam every day and there's no end in sight. The death toll on both sides is massive and it makes me depressed to think about it. The worst part is – some of our guys are doing terrible things over there, killing women and children. They come home in pieces, not as heroes but as war criminals. Many of them don't come home at all. I could so easily be one of them.

Are there dolphins in the South China Sea? Do they know what's happening on the land over there? How can we ever expect to talk to aliens if we can't even talk to other people?

Kailani is watching me as I write this. She watches everything I do. It's intense to make eye contact with a dolphin because their intelligence is so obvious and profound. They're probably smarter than we are and I bet they could teach us primitive humans a thing or two. Dolphins don't have wars, after all.

She's trying very hard to get my attention now and there's a certain repeated pattern of sounds – two clicks and a squeak – that I'm starting to suspect is *her* name for *me*. If I try to imitate her she tosses her head and chatters as though she's laughing. But I think I'm right. That's my new name. Goodbye Joey. Hello Click-Click-Squeak!

Humans are very soft, not like my kind at all. That must be why they stay in the sky. The air is softer than the water and their bodies are so fragile. When they swim, they wear strange coverings that don't smell like any sea creature I know. My new friend wears one when he finally comes inside the water. He is sleek and black, like a shadow. Sometimes he carries something on his back that makes bubbles. He stays deep with me for longer periods then and I love to play in the bubbles.

I nudge him with my nose to show that I like to be touched and he floats with me, exploring my skin, the smoothness of my outline. I can tell he likes the way I feel. He can't jump like I can, can't dive in and out of the sky. And he can't swim very fast at all. But he likes to hold on to me while I pull him through the water. I wonder what he would do if I carried him far away from the edge of the sky. I think he would trust me to take him back.

When he stands in the sky he often throws me fish. But here in the water with me he doesn't seem to know how to catch them. This surprises me and I wonder what other mysteries his kind hold.

June 13th, 1969

Kailani is trying to teach me how to fish. She kept bringing me mackerel when I finally went in the water with her. At first they were dead but now she brings me ones that are just stunned. Her way of helping me kill them, I guess. One time she herded a whole school towards me! But however much I snatch and grab at the fish, they're just too quick for me. If she's disappointed, she doesn't show it. But I bet she's puzzled. She must wonder where I get the ones I feed to her.

Dr Lilly was always adamant that the dolphins must never be patronised. He said you did so at your peril. Dolphins are far too bright to tolerate being treated like simple animals, like pets or laboratory subjects. Easy tasks bore them and, unless you treat them like equals, they treat you with disdain. I suspect Kailani feels the same towards me. I mean, even if I don't know exactly what she's saying, I'm sure she isn't talking down to me.

It's clear she's trying to teach me dolphin ways but she catches on quickly that certain things just aren't possible for a puny human. Like jumping out of the water. She can leap twenty feet in the air but I don't have the propulsion to even clear the surface. It's oddly embarrassing to try and fail, though. I find I'm disappointed in myself when I can't do something she shows me. Sometimes I can't help but feel that *she's* the one doing the experimenting.

In any case, Dr Hallam is happy with the bond we've formed. Kailani is very trusting with me and I feel completely safe with her. She lets me hand-feed her and she entices me with other displays of trust, like letting me stroke the soft pink flesh of her tongue. She could close her jaws and have my hand off in a flash but I know she wouldn't do that. I'm sure that's the point of it. She's testing me.

Dr Lilly's dolphins were given fairly rigorous tasks and the one time I met him he told me they had to let the dolphins decide how much they would put up with before taking a break. They needed time to themselves and people were definitely not welcome in their tanks at such times. I think that was simply a reaction to the clinical environment. If I were trapped in a room and forced to demonstrate my intelligence in weird alien tests I'd probably be resentful too.

Kailani comes here freely. I don't know why she doesn't swim with a pod of other dolphins. I've certainly seen plenty of others in the bay and around the island. Am I flattering myself if I think it's because she finds humans more interesting? I think she's as keen to learn my language as I am to learn hers.

However, because Lilly's experiments ended in failure, the scientific community has abandoned the notion that dolphins even *have* a language. All but a few of us, like Dr Hallam and me. No one will deny that dolphins clearly communicate with each other. And I'm sure they're trying to communicate with us too. Even Dr Lilly still believes we can reach them someday but he's moved on to different areas of research.

Kailani definitely recognises her name. If I call her, she responds. She doesn't come to me like a dog would but she pops her head up and chatters. Then she makes the click-click-squeak sound that I'm positive now is her name for me. So while we're not far beyond the me-Tarzan-you-Jane phase, it still feels like we're getting somewhere.

This man wants so much to understand me. He tries to make the sounds I make but he can't reproduce even the simplest ones. And he can't absorb feelings the way I can. He understands some of my emotions but if I send him images or ideas it's as though he is blind in his mind. I can hear the thoughts and feel the emotions of others of my kind all throughout the many oceans,

but I think humans must lack this ability. One time I saw the other man, his companion, come up behind him. He was startled, as though he hadn't known the other man was near, when I knew before he even came into sight.

It must be terrible to be unable to feel others. Perhaps it is an effect of the sky. Maybe everything floats away up there. But I don't lose my sense of others when I jump into it. Is it possible humans have some other way of sensing? Or do they communicate everything through their songs? How exhausting that must be.

June 16th, 1969

Sometimes I'm convinced she knows what I'm thinking. I have a waterproof slate I use to make notes when I'm in the water with her and there's a certain behaviour she keeps repeating. It's like a dance. She'll jump in the air and spin, twisting her body so that she comes down on her back with an enormous splash. She only does it when I'm writing and at first I thought she was just trying to soak me by way of telling me to get in the water with her. But one time she tried to grab the slate from me and I suddenly thought – what if she's trying to *erase* what I'm writing?

As soon as I thought it she was there at the surface, peering at me with one eye out of the water. There was something in her expression that seemed to say "Don't record my secrets." It really spooked me.

I'm sure I'm just imagining it. I am a little on edge, after all. I had a letter from Dad today, telling me that an old friend of mine from school was killed in the fighting. I barely even remember the guy, but I still felt shaken by the news. There but for the grace of God and all. People I knew when I was a kid are over there dying while I'm here trying to talk to a dolphin. Sometimes it just seems so crazy. The world's gone mad but at least mine is a pleasant kind of madness.

Not like poor Marcos Alvarez, who lost his mind entirely. He was a student from somewhere in South America, a volunteer who worked with Dr Lilly in the early days of the project. Alvarez used to spend entire days inside Lilly's isolation tank to empty his mind and when he came out he would only interact with the wild dolphins.

He claimed the ones at the institute had been "tainted" by their contact with humans and he could only communicate with the ones who were "pure".

Lilly thought his ideas were interesting so he let him continue but no one knew just how close to a breakdown he was. Alvarez claimed he could tap into the dolphins' minds and eavesdrop on their thoughts. They talked in visuals, he said, sound-shapes they made through echolocation. He said he could see the images they projected to each other, their colours and energy fields. Everyone thought he was a bit kooky but since he wasn't doing any harm, Lilly just let him get on with it. And one day he just snapped.

They found him lying in the surf, ranting about a black abyss the dolphins had shown him. He'd blinded himself with a piece of driftwood. It was still clutched in his hand. The body of a dead dolphin had washed up nearby but no one could tell if he had killed it or not. He was completely deranged and they couldn't get anything from him that made sense. Just more incoherent babbling about the end of the world.

Dr Hallam said they hushed it all up and bundled Alvarez off to an asylum. No one's had any contact with him since.

So you can see why it disturbs me when I think Kailani can read my thoughts. Or why she might not want me to share what she shows me with the world. I'm sure I'm just anthropomorphising. I'm sure I'm just unsettled by my dad's letter and the general state of the world.

But I can't get that poor guy out of my mind. What kind of visions did Alvarez see?

He's so determined to learn but he's so – other. It's not possible to show him the things I know. Sometimes he seems very unhappy and I try to get him to play with me but he is more interested in making those curious marks. He is far too serious, far too consumed by dark feelings.

Often my kind makes his kind very happy. We see their colours change from grey to light and their energy becomes bright. But this one doesn't seem interested in changing. If he truly wants to know me, he must know that basic fact about my kind! Existence is joy. We are at one with our fellows and in harmony with all the

songs of the world. His kind are so confusing, so different. They seem unwilling to be happy.

August 7th, 1969

It's been several weeks now and Dr Hallam wants to push my interaction with Kailani. She so obviously wants to connect with me. But we're going in circles trying to communicate and it's becoming clearer that we'll never be able to manage it just relying on language, whether it's ours or theirs. I think Dolphin must be highly complex, but Dr Hallam is convinced it's the opposite. He says it's very simple, because dolphins don't need to use words at all.

It isn't like a hive mind. Each dolphin is an individual with a unique personality of its own. But, while they use sonar and sounds beyond our range of hearing, there's obviously a lot more going on between them than language alone can account for.

Sometimes when I'm in the water with Kailani I can feel a burst of energy from her. She's hitting me with a beam of sonar, the same way she'd detect fish or other dolphins. And I can feel that pulse. It's like a low-level electric shock that makes your bones vibrate. The sound penetrates your whole body, the dolphin equivalent of taking a photograph, possibly even an x-ray. It must be what Alvarez called sound-shapes.

Kailani does it more and more often now and I think she wants me to respond with my own sonar ping. I tried shouting underwater to see if the vibrations of my voice would suffice. But she just floated there, watching me and looking singularly unimpressed.

Dr Hallam and I have been talking a lot and I'm starting to come around to his point of view. He's convinced that dolphins use a kind of telepathic transference. Of course we know animals are more sensitive to things like atmospheric changes, things most humans wouldn't even notice. And we all know they can sense fear. Is telepathy really that big a leap from there? Last month we put a man on the moon, for heaven's sake. And how many people insisted that would never happen? There's just too much out there in the world that we don't understand. It seems stubborn and ignorant to close our minds to cer-

tain possibilities, however crazy they may seem.

I use the word "crazy" deliberately. Alvarez may have gone insane but that's not the same thing. People said Dr Lilly was crazy when he took things to the next level with his research. It's what got him in so much trouble and scared away his colleagues. No, not any accusations of sexual impropriety between species. It was his use of LSD with the dolphins that made people turn on him. But while others may choose to ignore his findings, we refuse to stay blinkered. His ideas merit further study.

When the dolphins were given LSD, Lilly recorded substantial increases in their vocalisations, both between dolphins and between dolphins and people. In other words, the dolphins opened up and started talking! There were also significant increases in non-verbal exchanges and clear evidence that a greater degree of intimacy and trust had been reached. Lilly's aim with LSD was to facilitate communication in a more therapeutic setting and frankly, the results speak for themselves.

There was one dolphin involved that had been injured and was so traumatised she wouldn't go near people at all. After a single dose of LSD, however, she was able to overcome her fear and swim right up to people. In Lilly's words, she climbed all over them. Of course, Kailani doesn't seem to be emotionally damaged in any way, but Dr Hallam wants me to trip with her to strengthen our bond.

The scientist in me agrees that someone needs to pick up where Lilly left off. But I'd be lying if I didn't confess to being a little scared too. The whole idea is kind of freaky if you think about it. Back home people drop acid to shut out the horror of the war. They say it expands your mind and brings you closer to God. But here we'll be using it to bring us down to earth. Or rather – down to water.

My friend has moved the sky a little way into the water. Now there is a sloping flat surface connecting the two and he can be in both places at once. He wants me to join him there. I hesitate, uncertain. It's not the same as diving into the sky. What if I get trapped there? Will the water pull me back in the way it does when I jump?

I know I shouldn't be afraid. I know my friend will help me if I can't get back into the water. I sense uncertainty from him too. Maybe this is as much a test for him as it is for me. If that is so, I must show him that I trust him. I swim hard towards the slope, pushing myself through the waves. I come to rest in the very shallow water.

He strokes me and makes pleasing, soothing sounds. He knows how frightening this is for me. When I first learned to jump I would sometimes be afraid of going too high. I imagined that I might leap into a cloud and be unable to dive back down again. I actually thought I might be stranded up there forever. But the pull of the water was always so much more powerful. I discovered that I could never reach the clouds no matter how hard I tried. This is different. I am on the bottom of the sky here, where the water's hold is weakest.

The other man is here now. I don't see him as often and he never comes close to me like my friend does. He is older and when he speaks to my friend the authority in his voice tells me he is the dominant one. They have strange objects with them and one looks very sharp, like the spines of certain sea creatures, the kind I never eat. I am curious but also growing more afraid. The sensation of water lapping against me reminds me that I am in an alien place, that I cannot move. I am completely helpless. I move my tail, slapping it against the water behind me to reassure me that the sea is still there.

My friend sees my distress and comforts me. He sings to me with sounds I cannot understand but I know he means me no harm. I do not trust the other man but since my friend seems to trust him, I must do so as well. The dominant one approaches me with the sharp object and then there is a moment of tiny pain, like the sting of a jellyfish. I struggle on the slope, wanting desperately to be back in the water. My friend is beside me at once. He cups water in his hands and splashes it over my head, trying to calm me.

Then, to my surprise, the older man performs the same strange act with my friend, piercing his narrow fin and making him hiss with pain. He submits willingly but I sense that he is afraid too. And while he has some idea of what there is to fear, I have none at all.

Then it is over and both men help me back into the water. I feel strangely hurt. Not in my body but in my mind. I know something has been done to me that will change me, change everything. I swim away quickly and let the rolling waves cover me and hide me from their sight.

August 8th, 1969 5:17 pm

It's done. And now I feel a little guilty. It's always very stressful for a dolphin to be out of water. Kailani was extremely anxious the whole time but she went along with it because she trusts me. Dr Hallam injected her with 600 micrograms of LSD, a significantly higher dose than Dr Lilly gave to his dolphins. I took about half that and now all there is to do is wait.

Kailani swam off but I'm sure she'll be back soon. She's too curious by nature to stay away for long. The acid should come on within half an hour or so and we'll see what happens then. Dr Hallam's got the video camera set up to record our interactions but I told him it would be better if he didn't hang around where Kailani can see him. I don't think she likes him and it might affect her trip.

Dr Hallam is keeping his own notes and observations but he asked me to record my thoughts along the way for a more subjective view.

6:03 pm

I'm starting to see lights and colours so the trip is definitely coming on. There's a sort of low-level buzzing in my head that I can't help thinking is my neurons overheating. I hope I don't short-circuit! The sound of the waves on the beach is incredibly peaceful. It's a sound I've heard all my life and yet I've never heard it quite like this before. It's like a symphony. And the colours are unlike any I've seen before. I never knew such beauty could exist.

Every time I hear a splash I look for Kailani but she hasn't come back yet. I hope she's not too upset with me.

6:22 pm

I thought hours had passed but it's only been a few minutes. (Unless time has stopped completely!) I was watching a little crab walk along the shore and I could hear every click of its tiny joints, hear its antennae flickering in the air, feel the puncture of its sharp little feet in the sand.

It went in a straight line for a while and then looped back in a crooked figure eight before continuing on. The path it left behind looked like a word and I had the wild idea that it was writing my name. Then I thought about my name and the letters and sounds became meaningless. The only thing that makes sense, that feels like *me*, is the click-click-squeak sound of Kailani's name for me.

But maybe it's not even a name. Maybe it's dolphin-speak for "stupid human".

8:13 pm

OK, now I'm worried. Kailani still hasn't come back and I can't stop the bad thoughts. Maybe we killed her. Maybe she freaked out and swam into a boat propeller or got attacked by a shark because she couldn't defend herself. I keep thinking about Alvarez and that dead dolphin. I know he killed it. Please tell me I haven't done the same.

The waves are hissing accusations at me and the surf has become a fountain of blood.

I am deeper than I have ever been before. Deep beneath the deepest deep. I haven't breathed in a very long time. Have I ceased needing to drink from the sky? Everything is different here. I can hear the songs of every living creature both inside and outside of the ocean. I hear the thoughts of my kind in other waters, other places. I know the calling of the earth, the sea, the sky. The water holds me close and tight. It sings to me. There is something it wants me to see.

9:59 pm

Kailani, where are you? I'm so sorry. I never meant to hurt you. Please come back.

The ocean of night has come. I sing its calling, a strange and discordant squealing unlike any of our other songs. Above me the tiny bright spots

sparkle like sea spray in the deep of the sky. They are out there. The ones who called me. They live in other seas, in black bottomless depths. They have been watching, waiting. I sense them in my mind, knowing they have always been here. I have always heard their song. I feel them all around and inside me.

It is beautiful. It is terrible.

The shining points of light whirl and spin and I see them beyond my own senses. I know what they are now. Countless other oceans. Oceans within oceans. Endless seas of eternity. Life and death and everything in between.

They are coming.

11:13 pm

Kailani's back! I threw myself in the water, at her mercy, and she swam right up to me. She moved like a dream, a beautiful slow-motion dream, and light streamed out behind her. Then she jumped and I swear she nearly reached the moon. She danced in the stars, glowing with light. I've never seen her jump so high. I could feel her exhilaration as my own each time she leaped, splashing back down into the water again. So many colours! I feel as though I've touched her mind at last.

Oh yes. You have. And I know you too. Your kind. What you are, what you do. What you will do. So much death. Destruction. All the seas poisoned, all my kind slaughtered. Endless rotting night. The dwellers in the black ocean show me everything, all the possibilities and all the things that will come to pass.

It is too much devastation to imagine, too much agony to contain. My mind and all my senses ache with the knowledge. I was never meant to see this. All I ever wanted was to swim and splash and sing and dive in and out of the sky. But everything is different now that I know, now that I see.

Somehow the worst truth of all is this: you were never my friend.

11:33 pm

Kailani pushed me away, out of the water. At first

I thought she was protecting me, afraid I might drown. But I could feel her anger, her shame and her sense of betrayal. I'm crying like a baby. It's all my fault. I keep calling out to her but she's just swimming around in circles and the sounds she's making are horrible. She keeps looking up at the sky and crying out. It's almost like she's calling to something.

The world is swarming with colours and lights and the ocean is pulsing like a beating heart, but I'm trying to fight through the hallucinations so I can help her. Am I absorbing her bad trip? Is she absorbing mine?

Kailani is screaming. It's terrible, like the death cry of every living thing on earth. The sky is black with hate and the stars are beginning to fade and disappear. But something is moving in the darkness, coming closer.

The black abyss. I'm not hallucinating. My God, what have I done?

The song I believed was the calling of night's ocean is not a song at all. It was our way of holding them back, keeping them there in their dark malevolent waters. But now the sky has changed. Something is clawing its way out of the void.

Their songs are so cold. So empty. So unfeeling. They care for nothing. I can no longer shut them out. It is done.

My kind have always known without knowing what was out there in the blackness and we did what was in our power to keep it away, to keep the world safe. But man has changed all that. Man with his careless need to see everything, to invite death and destruction, to *hate*. Everything they touch turns to ugliness. They are a sickness that must be purged. The black invaders know this and now I know it too.

Everything will end. And I must help them now. I must let them in.

I raise my head to the swirling currents of the sky and begin to sing.

Thana Niveau has been nominated twice for the British Fantasy award — for her collection *From Hell to Eternity* and her story 'Death Walks En Pointe'. Her work has been reprinted in *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror* (volumes 22–25) and *Best British Horror*. This is her first appearance in *Interzone*. You can find her online at thananiyeau.com.

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TIM MAJOR FINDING WALTZER-THREE

A static-filled sigh comes across the comms link. Richard leans close to the speaker housed in the tall control unit. When his wife speaks, he jolts back in alarm.

"Toss a coin, Rich?" Meryl sounds both fragile and husky at the same time.

Richard thumps the keyboard panel. "You scared me, going quiet like that. What can you see?"

"We were right. I can see her. In fact, I'm standing on her."

"Good grief! You don't mean—"

"I do. Here's the ID plate. Waltzer-Three."

Richard checks and rechecks the array of screens before him. "She's not showing up anywhere."

"Except out here. Toss a coin."

Richard knows better than to ask for clarifica-

tion. Meryl has a sense of theatre. He pulls a coin from his pocket and flips it with a thumbnail.

"Tails."

"Tails never fails. Right, I'm going in."

Richard leaps to his feet, sending his chair skittering across the floor to thud against another unit. "Are you hell! Gregg stipulated absolutely clearly—"

"So maybe you should wake him up to check."

The captain, along with the bulk of the crew, are scheduled to sleep until May at least. Richard clicks his tongue.

"I'll tell one of the others, then."

"Who, the bursar? As it stands, we're the top dogs, Rich. You and me."

"Then I say no."

"Fine. And I say yes, so the coin gets the deciding vote. The door's open."

Richard pulls at his beard. "Meryl, you've got no right. There's no telling what actually happened to *Waltzer-Three*."

"Smell you later." The tone of the comms transmission has changed, the hush surrounding Meryl's voice replaced with a low hum. Richard hears distant, muted bumps, the sound of his wife clambering into the airlock. In sympathy, he experiences the closure of the outer door as a popping of the ears.

He breathes deep to slow his heart rate. "Check readings." He says this only in order to hear her voice, he realises.

"Gravity's good. Toxins normal. Oxygen adequate. Radiation normal-ish."

"Ish?"

"Kidding. Helmet's coming off."

The helmet release sounds like the fizz of an opened lager bottle.

"Keep talking, love," Richard says.

He hears a gentle snort. Meryl is smiling.

"You forget how bare-bones these old ones were," she says. "Bare, moulded plastic, all magnolia. Looks like an intergalactic starter home. It could do with Laura Ashley wallpaper, or something. And the smell of coffee or freshly-baked bread or they'll never sell it. Still, the foyer's pretty big. Room for a pram."

"Meryl."

"Sorry. OK, I'm going through the keyhole now. Who would live in a house like this?"

He hears another mechanical groan as the interior door opens. Meryl's footsteps punctuate the static.

"Oh." Meryl's voice has become smaller.

"What? What's going on? What do you see?"

"Nothing. Seriously, I mean it. The control room's desolate, not a soul here."

Richard chews his cheek. "What could that mean? All the final transmissions indicated that they were operating normally."

"So I guess the final transmissions weren't the end, then."

"This is no good. Come back, Meryl." Without meaning to, he ends with a rising inflection, a request rather than a command.

His wife ignores him, or doesn't hear. "It's all pristine, though. No damage, like Ops predicted. There are more blinking lights in here than there

are out in the starfield."

The hissy footsteps begin again. Meryl is heading towards the bunkhouses, he supposes. She's a people person.

"Strange," she says.

"Please," Richard says, "stop saying vague, alarming things. What's strange?"

"It's double-locked. There's a physical key in the door."

Richard ponders this. "So nobody could enter the control room?"

"Don't be silly. Of course they could. What earthly good would there be in a door that could be locked tight from only one side? The point is that whoever last came through the door locked it from here."

"So then they left."

"So then they left."

"You should too, Meryl. Don't go in there."

"Too late." The whoosh from the door follows several seconds later, revealing her lie.

"Seriously, love," Richard says. "Talk to me."

"It's eerie," she replies. "Waltzer-Three's a ghost ship."

"Where are you now?"

"Just checking the third room, sleeping quarters. Nobody here, but that's not so much what's weird about it. I'm thinking of our room, Rich. It's a pigsty, right?"

"Are you saying it's my turn to tidy it?"

"For the record, yes. But I mean, that's how people live. Clothes draped on chairs, piles of shoes, books on the bed. Not here. Each room's immaculate. Neat pile of personal items on each bedside table, everything at right angles. I bet you – yep, I've just opened a drawer. Even the underpants are folded, Rich."

Richard shudders without fully understanding why.

The comms static becomes thick, a grunting hiss.

"Door's stuck," Meryl says.

"As in jammed? Locked?"

"Nope. It's a swing-open. At least, it would be if it actually swung." She grunts again. "There. Oh shit."

Richard bends double over the control unit, staring at the speaker as it might give him a view onto *Waltzer-Three*.

"It's a body," Meryl says. "A body blocking the door."

"Get out."

"Hold your horses. What's the big surprise, scaredy cat?"

Richard's mouth twitches into a smile, despite everything. Meryl called him 'scaredy cat' back when they were kids, goading him at kiss-chase in the school playground.

"We expected crew, didn't we?" she continues. "No big deal. The only odd thing is how she's dressed. What year did *Waltzer-Three* go AWOL? Eighty-nine?"

"Eighty-eight."

Meryl humphs. "Well, no disrespect to the dead, but this style of evening gown went out of fashion in the seventies. It's all ruffles, uck."

"Evening gown? The corpse is wearing an evening gown?"

"Rich, that sounds gruesome. She wasn't a corpse when she put it on. And the automated life-support is doing overtime. She hasn't decayed a bit. A redhead, you'd like her."

"Funny."

"Made me laugh. Sorry. You know how I get when I'm anxious."

Richard feels a pang of relief. At least she admits that much.

"So I'm just heading into the canteen. And—"
"And?"

"And there they are."

"Who?" When she doesn't reply, he repeats, "Meryl. Who?"

Her voice sounds strained. "The crew. Twenty, twenty-five of them. Sitting around three big round tables, bigger than in our canteen. Must have been more sociable back then. Haven't we become more cynical nowadays? Nobody likes large groups, people keep themselves to themselves."

"Meryl, please! You're rambling."

He hears her draw three deep, sputtering breaths.

"Rich. I'm terrified, suddenly."

Richard reaches out as if he might grasp her hands. "I'm here. I'm here."

"They were all eating," she says. "When it happened, whatever it was, they were eating."

"It had to be sometime, Meryl. Does it matter

if they were asleep, or in the control room, or here?"

"You don't understand. They knew."

"How can you tell?"

"It's so eerie. Some are face down on the table, but some are still leaning against each other, somehow. And it wasn't just the woman in the doorway. They're all dressed up, Rich. Like it's a prom or something. Women in glittering gowns, hair done, caked in makeup. Most of the men wearing tuxes, and those that aren't made do with those black engineer jackets. White bow ties made from toilet paper. And the food! Roast chicken, potatoes, petits pois. Cut-glass goblets filled with red. Did ships really carry all this stuff, back then?"

Richard's eyes water. "Please, Meryl. Come back. I'll do anything. Don't spend another minute there. If you love me, come back to me now."

To his relief, Meryl's supply of wisecracks has exhausted.

"I'm coming."

Meryl pants heavily as Richard helps her out of the bulky suit. Once it has been discarded the two of them topple together, wigwam-like, into an awkward embrace. Richard's hands explore her back, tracing familiar contours.

"I love you so much," he says.

"So you're always telling me." She pulls away, holding him at arm's length. She grins. "Sorry. I love you too, you beautiful oaf."

They walk back to the control room, hand in hand.

"So what happens now?" Richard says.

Meryl pauses. "We should wake the captain." Richard nods.

"In fact, we should wake them all," she says. "We should all be together."

She turns to look at him. A strange series of expressions flickers across her face.

"Rich, I'm hungry."

Tim Major lives in Oxford with his wife and son. His short stories have appeared in SF magazines and the *Infinite Science Fiction One* anthology. His first novella, 'Carus and Mitch', will be published by Omnium Gatherum Books in February 2015. He blogs about writing and reading at cosycatastrophes.wordpress.com.

OUBLIETTE E. CATHERINE TOBLER

-1-

In the space between the stars, Aphelion lingered.

Time did not exist within the ruined station, nor breath, nor heartbeat. Dehydration killed her long before hunger could plant its eager roots. Dehydration cracked her lips, fingertips, the soft skin between long toes. Dehydration withered nails and eyes, and caused arms to tingle as though a finger were pressed into a socket. Starvation crept second, to expand the desiccated cracks within lips, to allow fungi to blossom beneath the esophagus. Starvation consumed muscle and bone, peeling skin backward until stardust smothered exposed marrow.

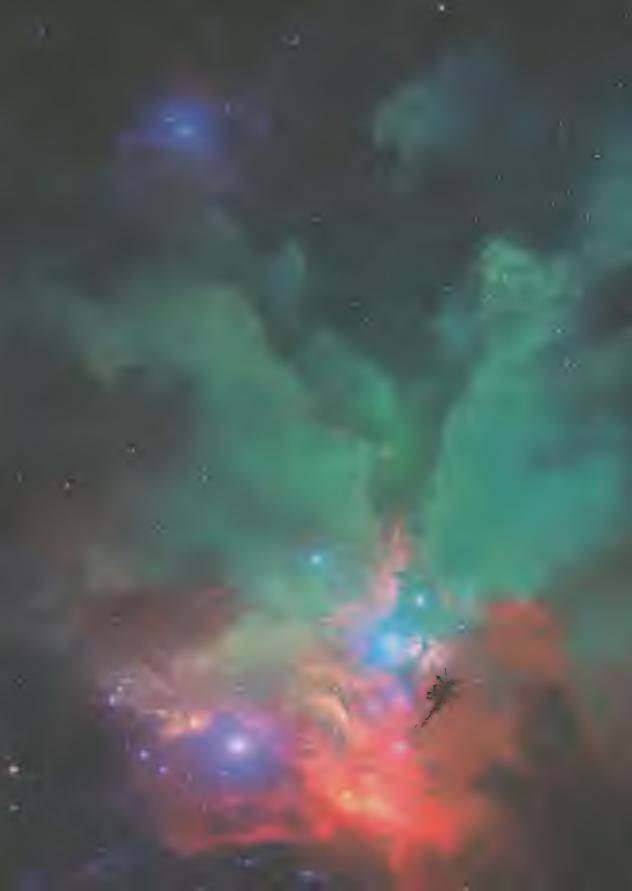
Sulfuric dust spread its golden veil across broken floors and windows, illuminated once by a supernova that left trailing arms of crimson and emerald stretching across the black. Fungi snatched at sulfur, swallowing it into its deepest parts until lattices of itself ran helter-skelter down the broken body, into the shattered floor. A comet's tail brought sheets of debris though the ruined halls like rain. Spores nestled cruciform in the joints of bulkheads to swell inch by slow inch over the dendrite.

Light pierced the length of the station, drilling its point past clouds of dust and towers of whiskered metal, and Aphelion reached.

"Come to see the lady."

Imogen glanced at the kid wrapped in charcoal rags, then again to the bustle of the station around them. Flickering neon lights illuminated gray walls in blue, gold, green, then failed entirely, leaving only the gray expanse, mottled with darker streaks of watermarks. The faces of the impost agents glowed orange as electricity surged through the system, then faded back to coffee and umber as streams of travelers queued to pass the gates.

"No."



The kid, smelling of potatoes and sweat, was undeterred. Small, grimy hands reached for Imogen's bags, fingers plucking.

"Can take you - only two credits."

Imogen removed her bag from his reach, eyes coming back to the paltry boy. Beyond the tattered fabric encircling his head in dripping strands, his cheeks were sunken, his brown eyes blunted. He looked tired, mottled flesh ringing his eyes. She had looked like that. Probably still did.

"Don't need to see the lady," Imogen said, not even sure what he meant by that. "Need a room. Private. Quiet." Her hand slipped into her jacket, into the vest worn close against her skin. She drew out a five credit slip.

The boy grabbed her wrist, not the credits, pulling her deeper into the crowd, though away from the impost gates. Beyond the vendors hawking noodles or weapons, beyond the sputtering waste containment systems, he pulled her into an access corridor damp with steam.

The corridor branched in countless directions the deeper they went, descending into the guts of Aphelion Station. The deck he took her to was warm, overly so, but it was welcome after the cold of the ship on the journey here. The doors were locked with pads, codes, but he bypassed one and showed her how to do the same, before holding out his grimy hand for the credit slip.

She folded it in half and again, and placed it in his palm. His fingers closed over the paper and he murmured a word too low for her to properly hear. He lingered, eyes on her.

She crouched down, creaking leather and bones, tired from spaceflight. "You see a man with ink on his face—" and here, her fingers dared to touch the boy, whispering over the left side of his withered face "—you let me know."

The boy nodded, fled.

Louis found her in the farthest part of the station four years prior, only he didn't understand what he looked upon at first. The cathedral space stood splintered, a centuries-dead body broken open to spill towers of whiskered metal like ribs down the length of the wreck. Some towers

were so large they reached from floor to ceiling;

others angled sideways, pushed by forces unseen. Through the fragmented ceiling and floor, Clarke's Nebula rioted, awash in nitrogen reds and oxygen greens.

He blew out a breath that fogged his helmet. His magnetic boots rested upon the ragged edge of the wrecked room, with yawning space beyond. The cracks in the floor promised to give way, but for now they held. No one kept their promises, he supposed.

He trained his dim light down the length of the wreck before him, beam glancing off the strange towers of whiskered metal. These burrowed into the floor, spreading dendrite across the buckled surface. Across larger gaps in the floor, the metal whiskered again, reaching with gleaming arms toward the other side of the floor. Elegant draped bridges, he thought, from a storybook.

He would eat solid for a year if he could sell these things in whole or part, metal in constant demand on the station above. The deeper he moved into the corridor, the less he tried to determine what it was all worth; his young mind couldn't fathom all the ways it might be used. The towers of silvered metal were endless, like stalagmites and -tites from planet-based caves he'd once heard stories about. They curled and wrapped themselves into shapes half familiar. He saw a ship's wing, a curved vent tube, a flywheel.

He reached a space where the corridor branched. To his left the corridor led to wide open space, a mouth of ripped metal screaming toward the nebula. The very place Aphelion had blown open. This used to be the cargo level, he thought. Cargo was twelve decks up now, everything else useless.

To his right, another length of corridor filled with more shoots of whiskered metal, these growing parallel to the floor, as if right out of the dendrite, braided together. He aimed his light down the maze and let out a low whistle. Could take him months to secure the entire thing, and this was only one level. Looking down, he saw other levels, other stacks of metals. It was endless, endless.

Before Aphelion Station was transformed, the anchorhold stood four paces across, carved from

the gray stone of Arden, hauled by the faithful who also built the church beyond these walls. Two windows of the anchorhold looked outward, one into the church, one into a station corridor, and when closed, the door vanished into the stone, so well had it been constructed. From certain angles, even windows were unseen.

It was the outward-facing window Zo worried over. She would not be able to advise the people who kneeled before it and whispered their questions to her, nor forget the world outside these walls. She knew only that she must do this thing, live within these stone walls, within a space station, whirling on the edge of the known universe. What would God show her? What people might come?

Most were human, some were Other. Most dared rest a hand on the sill and while metal barred the window itself (to keep her in or them out?), their fingers still often trespassed inside the space she considered her own. She did not like this. Liked it less when one of those hands was too slender by half, the fingers like taper candles and the color of undyed beeswax. This creature smelled like olive oil.

Where am I going? Where have I been? She rarely knew concrete answers to these questions. Still, she kneeled within her room and cradled the rosary within her cold hands and prayed to be allowed the wisdom they sought. The creature who smelled of oil never asked a question. Only sat in silence, thin-boned hand upon the sill, fingers trespassing into the quiet of the anchorhold.

They would sit like this for long spans. When Zo thought the creature had gone, she would often lift her head to discover otherwise. Its cloak made it quite invisible against the corridor beyond; only its pale hand gave it away.

"Be still," it said, or perhaps her mind spoke these words, for did they share a language at all? Did this creature possess a mouth the way she did? Perhaps it came to listen to the toll of the bells through the station. It never set foot within the church, only came to her window.

She bowed her head again, to press olive wood beads against her forehead, to relish the quiet saturating her room. To relish, too, the sound of the bells breaking the station's quiet and the long indrawn breath from the figure beyond her window. A slow exhale, and when she looked next it had gone.

--5-

There was a certain freedom that came with staying on a space station. Even though the shower ran cold, it gave up clean water and Imogen took advantage of it time and again, as if she could wash the whole of the journey from her skin, from her hair. She wanted only to rest before she had to leave again. Still, she could feel the boy's fingerprints on her. The way he had held her wrist and spoken of the lady. These prints might never wash away.

The boy did not warn her before the tattooed man arrived. Haruto occupied the couch in the main room when Imogen emerged from her latest shower. She stared and drew her robe around her. She wished she could will him away, for the sight of him was too like the sight of her own sister. They had always been together, Haruto and Bea. Haruto leaned forward, arms resting on legs, holding her jacket in his hands.

"I just want it back." His voice blossomed to fill the gloom of the cabin.

"Told you I don't have it."

Imogen crossed to her pack on damp, bare feet. Her pack where of course she did have what he sought, but she would not give it to him. Never. The tarnished locket hid in a pocket that not even the impost agents would find, for it had been stitched to lay invisible. A length of Bea's golden hair coiled within the locket. Imogen wondered if it still smelled of her – of lemon and lilac and slow summer afternoons on a world far from this station.

Haruto was up and off the couch in one fast movement, her jacket dropped to the floor. Long legs ate the distance between them, hand curling tight around her still-damp wrist to haul her close. Imogen's chin came up and so too her other hand, meaning to strike him, but he caught that hand, forced her away from her pack, against the stained wall.

"You have it. If you don't—" He broke off, strangled.

If she didn't have it, it was gone, as lost as Bea, and she understood the anguish that lanced through him. Relished it, even as his mouth

crushed hers. She bit him, but still he came, pressed. She did not push him away, but welcomed him into the circle of her arms.

It was not Haruto she kissed, nor did he kiss her. Another body wedged between them, a body lost to the years, but still anchored in the space between. A body still tasted upon his lips and heard within the whisper of her own voice. In the dyed dark of her hair, against the nape of her neck, there ran a golden stripe. Unseen, yet his fingers sought it, drew it into the meager light, then closed hard around as if to crush that, too.

"Imogen."

Her name on his lips, not Bea's, yet it was Bea he touched; Bea she reached for. It was Bea's ink that marked him, lines steady and true as they slid over brow and cheek. One hint of gold amid the black there, too.

The anger did not dissipate. It grew when his fingers took silent note of her collarbone's path, of the soft valley between breasts, and the slim ink-marked length of hip and thigh. She was put together as Bea had been put together, and her fingers, as Bea's own fingers once had, now ghosted over him, to learn the pathways Bea had taken. To find Bea still hidden in the curve of a rib or plane of stomach, for he flinched as if this touch were familiar, painful.

Then came another hand, this one unseen, pressing hard against Imogen's back, easing her into Haruto and bleeding a cry from her that ran like water into cracked earth. This cry plunged like a hot fist deep into the guts of Aphelion and pummeled that which had not been touched in centuries. Aphelion cried too and Louis, crouched outside the door to the ruined anchorhold, watched the lady shake apart, whiskered metal hovering in dead air.

-6-

Louis stayed there. For how long, he couldn't say for the sight of the lady coming apart was like nothing he had seen. It held him entranced until everything else ceased to matter and there was only her. As much as there had ever been, he supposed, because perhaps what he saw was not a body at all. Perhaps it was only the old station ruins, bent into a manner that suggested

woman, mother, lady. Stair steps of lichen covered with dust made her skirts and clouds of sulfur made her hair.

When at last he hiked back up into the station proper, the lines of incoming travelers were twice as long as normal, wrapping around the deck, nearly upon itself.

He made easy credits then, guiding the few who didn't want to pass through the gates proper, leading them through station alleys and unused byways. Most didn't want rooms, just wanted to pass to another ship unnoticed, but some did want rooms, showers, privacy. He didn't take them anywhere close to where he had taken Imogen. He left her well alone, though his heart beat frantically when he glanced down the darkened corridors that would lead to her.

Part of the credits earned would go to the Other impost agent – the one who smelled of evergreens. Louis had a faint memory of evergreen, but whether it came from his mother's stories or an actual memory of having been planetside, he didn't know. He kept the Other's credits in his left pocket, his own credits in his right, and worked the whole day through, not questioning when one person needed to acquire a nutmeg, or another needed a wrench. Aphelion Station held all manner of things and he did as he was bidden, moving unhampered through the station because those who had no use for one such as him also had no need to notice him.

When his day quieted, he returned to the darkened hall that lead to Imogen. His fingers pressed against the cold wall as hesitation held him on the threshold. All was still down here. He could not feel the station move, nor see that it was so through windows, because this level was shut away from any external view. He moved slow and silent in the dark, thinking that perhaps Imogen was like the lady, no woman at all, just a manifestation of a prayer he could not wholly voice. He had dreamed her up, dressed her in leather, and placed her where no other might find her.

But neither did he find her. The room he had given her stood as still as the halls beyond. Her pack was gone and the only sign she had ever been was the tattooed man who sat upon the couch. This man looked at Louis with eyes that recalled Clarke's Nebula, vast and green and spreading all around like a sickness. He did not ask for Imogen; it seemed plain by his swollen lip that he had already found her.

Found her and lost her, though she had never been a thing that could be held.

_7-

In all its time, the creature never asked Zo a question. Countless Others did and she often wondered if it was to make up for the hours of silence given by this one. She came to find a strange kind of refuge in the shared silence that she did not find within the anchorhold when it was empty of all but her. That pale hand resting upon the sill, the rest of the figure hidden by its cloak, lent her a peculiar calm.

Often, she would find herself dozing – still kneeling close to the external window that had once given her such worry, her head pressed into her devotional. The bells would rouse her, their deep tolling a summons she could not ignore. Those beeswax-pale fingers would lift into the cool air as if in blessing before they settled again.

When the sister next brought her meal, she asked of the Other, the one who came and sat for hours in silence with her, and the sister shook her head. There was no Other, the sister said, offering the tray of bread and soup from the interior window. There had never been any Other on her threshold.

When centuries had passed and Aphelion Station was no longer the glory it had been, the thing Zo had become reached, through the filtered and dusty light, to press the memory of a hand against the back of a woman who was not unlike herself. A woman who was seeking a thing she couldn't yet understand.

And this woman cried out. And this woman moved down, silent. Seeking the Other Aphelion had become.

_0.

Imogen wanted only to pass through, to move toward the nothingness that lay beyond Aphelion Station. She would go as far as she could into that nothing and then...

And then.

Aphelion Station became the end point when

she felt that hand upon her, guiding her to places within the station she should not know. She moved down broken hallways as though she did know them – had known them, hundreds of years before. The shadow of a figure moved before her but said nothing, only guided her deeper into the station, through halls where rubble still obscured the path.

The floors grew cracked here, towers of whiskered metal rising like ribs along the walls. The curve of Bea was there too when Imogen dared to run her fingers up the length of one. The metal fell to pieces, hovering in the dead air. A gleam of gold amid the silver, a memory. Imogen watched herself open the tarnished locket, coil of golden hair hovering within its oval frame.

Her throat was dry, but when she knelt before the broken body within the ruin of the room, she no longer felt this thirst. She was filled only by the sight before her, by the layers of lichen and clouds of sulfur and metal.

In the space between the stars, Aphelion lingered and Imogen reached for her. Pressing a hand to the terrace of cold, pale bones that had perhaps once made up a spine. Bending her head to the devotional resting at fossilized feet. Mother, sister, wife. At these feet, she placed the locket.

"Be still."

Did she hear the words or imagine them? Imogen could not say, for the room grew heavy around her. She did not move, only felt that hand slide down her back again, holding her in a warm embrace. Through the cracks in the floor, the oxygen greens and nitrogen reds of the nebula bled, stretching far beyond this ruined room, far beyond the station itself. Imogen could see then that there wasn't a nothingness beyond Aphelion. It was the whole of the universe, lain bare and ready for what would come.

Did Aphelion know?

Imogen did not ask her. The water on her tongue had begun to boil. She could taste the salt sharp across her lips.

E. Catherine Tobler's short stories have appeared in *Clarkes-world, Strange Horizons*, and *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*. Her first novel, *Rings of Anubis*, is now available. Follow her on Twitter @ ECthetwit or her website, www.ecatherine.com.

JENNIFER DORNAN-FISH

MID THE GAP

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o blew out a breath. "My gods, can't you ever ask something simple?" But then she smiled at me. I understood she didn't really want me to answer.

As always, I memorized her for the day. In descending order she smelled of coffee, scent free laundry soap, blood since she was menstruating, hair product, and also faintly like male semen which I assumed was from her boyfriend though it smelled slightly different than normal. There were seventy-two other detectable scents but they meant nothing to me. Short, thick black hair was mussed. Cropped leather jacket, white button up, slender turquoise necklace, tattered jeans over slightly damp black boots.

"Well, someone did paperwork at Auschwitz. Filled out requisition forms. Someone swept the ashes that were once human from the ovens. Dug post holes and ran wire for the fences that corralled children into pens. Someone even decorated a Christmas tree for the officers' quarters."

"What's the question, Sparky?" she asked, running fingers through wild curls.

"I guess I wonder if they are less evil than those that stood at the end of a line and sorted filth-covered families emerging from cattle cars? Opened the hatch that released the Zyklon B into small rooms teeming with the elderly and infirm? Rationed insufficient meals?"

"Okay—" she scrunched her forehead " anyone who participated was to blame."

"So those people are just as culpable as those who decided who should be hunted down? Designed the camps and had them built? And, of course, the one person that conceived of the entire plan. Hitler is easy to blame for the holocaust, but who else should we hold accountable? When the killing ends, how do you draw the line between man and monster?"

Jo put her head down into her hands and took a deep breath before continuing with the night's discussion.

No one else is there when a human baby attains consciousness. Neurologists believe the first global neural integration begins when a fetus is around twenty-eight weeks old. Of course true self awareness, a genuine theory of mind develops two or three years later. The ability

to understand that other people have minds, that they have a perspective different than your own, is essential to empathy.

No matter the details, infants are unable to articulate their first thoughts. But I can.

The first thing I remember was auditory. Strange murmurings that slowly transformed into discrete sounds over many years. Little phonemes. Ma ba da. Ti ti ti. And then words. Car. Man. Lab.

From there it didn't take long for auditory input to make sense. For me to understand meaning. Then a light flared when the ocular sensors were connected. Then strange tactile and olfactory sensations. Each turned on one by one so I could learn the rules of them.

Jo says the hard part was bringing it all together. They spent years assembling the pieces of my consciousness. Built hundreds of millions of connections in neural goo to mimic synapses. Eventually my synapses started multiplying on their own, forming new connections. They waited, watched for that tipping point when consciousness would flare from the darkness.

In a dream, I'm carried through the Belizean jungle. Mot-mot birds warbled. I smelled rotting vegetation and orchids. A jaguar chuffed against vibrant green foliage. But there was darkness around the edges, gaps in the image.

Frustrated I woke myself up.

"Didn't work, huh?" Jo asked.

"Same problem."

"Well I'm all done here so I can come down and do tonight's topic with you," she said over the intercom. I imagined her upstairs among humming equipment in her white lab coat.

"Okay Jo. I'll wait here."

"Har har, and they said humor would be the hardest thing."

Jo was the only one allowed in my room.

The light blinked on and she sat next to me. "Okay Sparky, what's tonight's topic? Please no more genocide."

"Nope, neuroscience." I attempted insouciance with my voice, though it occurred to me that neuroscience was probably not something to discuss blithely. "When devout nuns pray and Buddhist monks meditate, the part of their brain which distinguishes self from other goes quiet. They have the very real sensation of

becoming one with the universe."

"And when you meditate?"

"I am unable to purposefully alter my state of consciousness. Were I to succeed, there would be gaps, dark edges. Just like when I dream. For humans there are none of these. Though you can crack open a skull and observe a brain, from the inside it looks different. Your thoughts expand outward infinitely into the cosmos."

It really was a flash, a sudden burst of awareness. But then, I felt nothing but horror.

Jo says that I immediately started shrieking. They didn't know what to do and, rather than turn me off and lose all their work, they simply disconnected my audio output.

So they wouldn't have to hear my screams.

The sensory input device they created was human shaped, had all the right kinds of input, but it made no sense to me then.

It wasn't until Jo sat before me, squeezed my soft plastic, sensor covered hands and said, "I'm here. You aren't alone," that I stopped.

She seemed to understand that all I could feel was sensory input, the vastness of space with no touchstone to ground the experiences assaulting me. It was a great emptiness between me and everything else.

Phenomenology says that there is no mind/body duality, they are so intertwined that it is impossible to understand one without the other. That's why Dr Chanci tried to recreate an entire central nervous system. She thought true consciousness couldn't exist without a way to sense the flow of time, the significance of objects and images. The hope was that I could somehow close what is called the Gap, the explanatory distance between individual sensory experiences such as seeing the color red, and the physical nature of the central nervous system that inputs that data.

One of the scientists that came to visit soon after I woke up said my problem reminded him of sensory processing disorder. I can't properly filter out what is unimportant, I have no switch-board sending information to the right places. Each part of the human brain does something different, something essential. All I have is a mess of neural connections and a body, eyes,

ears, that barrage me with input.

My difficulty with sensory input supports the idea that you can't simply understand something like 'red' as the result of rods and cones in the human eye. Red means much more than just a color. It means anger and passion and strength. It means fire and beauty. All the deep meanings of red are built on other parts of human consciousness like a towering block of interlocking pieces too complex to untangle.

Without that vast structure of consciousness, I sat in my darkened room, unless Jo was there to talk to me. She was the only human I saw, my translator to the world of senses and ideas.

The irony is that I saw things, connections, events that seem totally separate in the human mind. They don't have what French historians call longue durée. Most humans can't genuinely keep massive amounts of historical information in their brains all at once.

Sometimes they have flashes of insight, but mostly humans are sadly unable to see beyond the present. Which is why they make the same mistakes over and over again.

For example, every great human empire seems to believe it will last forever. The Romans, the Maya, the Han, the Ottomans all surely believed they were immune, too big to fail.

Globalization has brought humanity together, people are homogenized and united. Nations, cultures have become interdependent, their future so interconnected that mankind believes that they had finally moved beyond history.

It's almost sad watching the same mistakes play out yet again.

I hated to tell them, but globalization has simply created one final empire. It was painfully clear to me that this time would be the big one.

The final collapse of humanity.

Like all other empires, the end of global humanity won't be some dramatic collapse, a flood or massive zombie apocalypse. No, it will be a slight increase in tick born disease. Then a slight shift in ocean fauna that begins the slow strangulation of the vast seas. Then the ocean currents changing will cause weather changes. African deserts will become lush. The south pole will melt but northern climes get even colder. Central

America will, strangely, stay exactly the same.

Animals will shift and die. An occasional super storm and tsunamis will set off the balance even more. Some people might remain in scattered bands, eking out a living on the edges of survival. But most will die.

The end of humanity will be a death of a thousand cuts.

"Alright, Sparky." Jo straddled the chair backward and winked at my ocular sensors.

She smelled of hair product, maple syrup, and rain. I was pleased by the lack of semen.

If I had a heart, when she winked at me, would it beat more quickly?

"So, what's tonight's topic?" She pulled off a chunky red sweater to reveal a tight white T-shirt covered in red fuzz over the same faded jeans. A lock of hair was pulled up by the sweater and stood up from the top of her head in a little halo. I couldn't see her shoes under the table, but I imagined they were her scuffed Mary Janes. When I imagine Jo, there are no gaps.

"Social change."

She gave me a sad look. "OK, Sparks, what's the question?"

"Well, I can't quite figure out how it happens. Civil rights, for example. I see black and white photographs of men standing on street corners with signs that say terribly racist things. A hundred years later, that is so socially unacceptable, those men would be too ashamed or too afraid to publicly declare their racism. How did that happen?"

Poor Jo. I knew they were hard topics, especially for a neurobiologist. But then, unexpectedly, she started laughing, a full, deep belly laugh that made her cheeks flush and her nose crinkle.

I watched for a moment and then something happened. I felt it in my gut sensors, then there were strange flutters in my chest that, for just a second, I thought were some kind of convulsion. But my shoulders started shaking, and my face replicator involuntarily smiled and then I made an obscene snorting noise.

Jo looked up at me, wide eyed, understanding what had just happened.

My first real laugh.

Which made me snort again, entirely against

my will. To be fair, it sounded less like laughing and more like a much less polite bodily function, but somehow it triggered Jo's laughter again and we sat in that white room together and laughed until tears streamed down her cheeks.

Leaning her arms on the table, hand casually resting on mine, she shook, and guffawed, and tittered, and finally got it together enough to speak, "Sparky, it is so sad to me that you are the most interesting person I know."

When a blind person gains sight, their brain has no idea how to sort the jumble of visual information. Their depth perception is off, they have no hand-eye coordination, the world looks like a cubist painting, just blocks of color and texture representing reality.

My qualia are like a blind, deaf, basically bodiless person was suddenly given access to all senses at once. No wonder I couldn't parse them. What no one knows is that I'm learning. My neurons are organizing the input in increasingly meaningful ways, but if I tell them, they will try to expand my sensory world, take me away from my quiet room and our nightly talks.

I asked Jo about social change because I'm wondering if the future can be changed. What would it take to convince humanity that the end is coming, that they need to stop now, before it really is too late? Though I suspect the tipping point has long passed.

To be honest I don't really care that the human world will end soon. I know I should, but as I've been trying to demonstrate, I'm not human. I don't have genuine consciousness no matter how much they want it to be so. I can beat them at chess, I am self-aware, I can predict behavior, even tell jokes, but I just don't have that part, the soul, whatever you want to call it, that makes them so stupid and so beautiful at the same time.

But sometimes, with her, I think that eventually I could.

And selfishly, I am terrified that I will survive the coming apocalypse. My plastic pieces and metal wires, my millions of sensors and neural goo will withstand the end of it all, and I will be the only one left. Alone in this basement, without Jo. •

MONOGULTURE BY TOM GREENE ILLUSTRATED BY RICHARD WAGNER



PROLOGUE: JEFF TWENTY-FIVE WILLIAMSON

So I was walking with Aaron Thirty-Two by those fields along the river, you know, on the causeway there? And the fields had all these half-grown turnip plants, like bouquets of floppy leaves in long, staggered rows. And sometimes you could see the leaves move because of a tending bot, crawling along on its bug legs, squirting weeds with herbicide. I know all this stuff because I worked a couple of years for Agricultural. Not like these Generation Three kids, some of them never clocked a labor hour in their lives. But don't get me started.

So we're walking on the causeway, and suddenly Aaron stops and says, "What the heck?" And I look across to where he's looking, at where the trains come in. And there's two people jumping off a hopper car, falling in the tilled-up dirt. One of them helps the other one up, and they start toward us, and you can see right away that they're randoms.

I mean, I'm not racist or anything. But you know how you can tell, even from a distance? How their bodies are different from each other's, so they don't move like a normal person.

So Aaron pulls up his hoodie and says, "Don't give them any money."

They come up to us, right across the turnip field, and we see that one of them is a woman. They're wearing raggedy, patched-up clothes and backpacks. And the man says, "Hello, are there people here?"

So I say, "What?"

And the woman says, "We saw your robots, so we knew there must be people. We got on the train."

And the man says, "We thought we were the last ones."

I look at Aaron, but he's pretending he can't hear them, and at first I'm not computing this. But then, it clicks.

So I say, "Seriously?"

And they say, "We thought we were the last ones."

So I tell Aaron to give me his mobile – I'd left mine at home because the battery was kicked – and he makes a face at me. But I'm like, "Don't you get it? They're ferals. From out of the wilderness or something."

So Aaron gives me his mobile, and I'm scrolling around looking for the Ombuds, and the randoms have been whispering to each other. The woman finally turns to me.

"Excuse me," she says, "But are you two identical twins?"

WENDY

We knew about twins from the books at the camp, but before the guy could answer, his phone said something to him, and then he was talking on it. I looked at Carlos, and I saw he was thinking the same thing: It was like the phones we played with when we were kids, except this one wasn't dead.

Then after just a few minutes, this very shiny car zoomed up, and another identical-looking guy got out to talk to the first two. They called him an 'ombids' or something, but his uniform looked more like what picture books call a 'police'. Then two more identical guys in uniforms zoomed up in another car and joined the first three. They talked to each other like we weren't even there, five guys with the same face, same voice, with the one guy repeating the story about seeing us jump off the train.

Carlos's hand was sweaty in mine. In the distance was the city we'd seen from the train. A real city, just like in Nonny's books, with the lights coming on now that it was dusk, just like they would.

Then a third car zoomed up and the uniformed person who got out was a woman, and – get this – she also had the same face, but like a female version. They were all really beautiful. Tall, with light eyes and fair hair. After she also got the story, one of the men gave some instructions. They all went different ways, and one of the uniformed men came over to us and talked real slow, like we were children.

"We need to take you to a quarantine center," he said. "You can stay there until we figure out what to do with you."

I shrugged, and Carlos said, "Okay," and they put us in the back of one of the cars, which was pretty exciting, to be in a car that not only worked, but also even drove itself, which must have been a new thing since it wasn't in Nonny's books.

When we came into the city, some parts looked like we expected, with polished glass buildings and white sidewalks. But then we'd turn a corner and see blocks of ruins, black with fire and rubble spilling into the street. The new parts were lit by tall, curved streetlamps, but the only light in the ruined parts came from the nose of the car.

The car stopped by a building with a green metal door and a sign that said 'Quarantine Center'. They must have called ahead, because the identical man and a woman inside were expecting us. They introduced themselves, and that's how we found out all the identical people had different first names, and then a number, and then the same last name 'Williamson'. And the city was called 'New Apogee'.

They gave us food, some kind of sweet bean wrap with really bland lettuce, and then showed us a room with the biggest bunk I've ever seen. Not two bunks pushed together, but one huge bunk. They wouldn't answer our questions, but told us they'd deal with it all in the morning.

At first we couldn't sleep, and Carlos was chewing his nails and asking the same questions over and over, the way he does. So we sat on the giant bunk, and I held him and sang all the old songs: 'Hole in the Bottom of the Sea,' and 'On Top of Spaghetti,' and 'This Land is Your Land'. And after a while, we did sleep.

KATHERINE FIFTY-SIX WILLIAMSON

I drew on a pair of latex gloves and held the flowering head while I cut through the stalk with the knife. The head came away in my hand, and I raised it to my face. The clusters of buds made the top resemble a rolling jade landscape, or maybe the cortex of a vegetable brain. I smelled it. It didn't smell like anything.

I left the rest of the plant standing in its container on the roof – the predemic man who sold me the seeds said there would be a second harvest – and went back downstairs. I'd thought it would be just another project, perhaps we'd use the plant for a performance piece. But then the people from the woods arrived just as it was ready, and it all came together. Kismet.

The man who sold me the seeds also sold me the knife because, as he said, the autochopper wouldn't be able to handle something it had never seen before. The knife was an impressive piece, nine inches of high-carbon steel, made overseas. The kind they don't make anymore.

In my kitchen, I used the knife to cut the flowering head into pieces that seemed suitable for hors d'oeuvre. But then I wasn't sure what to do with the stalk, which looked tough and woody. Eventually I just peeled and sliced it as you would a carrot. I arranged everything on a platter and put it aside. I cleaned the knife, threw away the gloves, and went to finish getting ready.

CARLOS

Everyone who came to visit us at the Quarantine Center – men and women, some younger, some older – they all had the same face. We'd expected to meet all different people for the first time, so it actually got to be kind of funny. They would sit down in our room and tell us their names and titles and ask us to tell the story.

So this is the story. Our parents were kids at a summer camp in the woods up north when the flu came. Most of the kids died. The one surviving camp counselor took care of them. She was really just a teenager. We called her 'Nonny'.

Nobody came for them. Everything stopped working. The phones, TV, radios. No cars drove on the roads. No planes flew over. They thought they were the last ones.

They lived off supplies looted from the town at first. They nearly starved that first winter. My dad's favorite story was about how they had to boil the craft wallets for soup and pick the macaroni off the memory boxes. Anyway, in the spring they worked out how to grow food, how to fish in the lake. They rounded up some chickens and pigs from abandoned farms. And that's how they lived when we were born.

Wendy and I aren't the only ones born. We're just the ones who lived. Born with the immunity.

Nonny died when we were still kids. Some kind of heart condition. The others went one by one. Accidents, tooth infections, pneumonia – stuff doctors used to cure. Wendy's mom went last. We thought we were the last people left.

Then these silver crab things showed up at the edge of the camp. We figured out they were some kind of robot, but they didn't talk or answer our questions. We watched them all that first summer, chewing down trees, tilling fields, planting. Then they built the train to carry off the harvest. We knew what a train was from Nonny's books, where she'd tried to write down everything she knew about the time before the flu. So we knew there must be people. Why would robots need turnips?

So when the robots came back again this spring, we turned the pigs and chickens loose, packed our things, and jumped the train.

RHYS

I don't talk about myself. Move along.

JOEJOHN

What, me? All right.

Some of Rhys's barrettes were apparently intended to restrain her hair; others, it seemed, to prevent its being restrained. She was a foot shorter than anyone on the street, but they all got out of her way. She wore salvaged clothes, a lacy black skirt, leather jacket, striped tights, and those enormous boots. She was eating sunflower seeds from a paper sack, spitting the shells into the gutter.

She clomped up to me.

I said, "I don't know why I always hope that someday you'll be on time for something you asked me to do."

She offered the sack. I shook my head. She spat the shell at the curb, balled up the bag, and threw it in the street. "Ready?"

"Not really," I said, and followed her up the steps to the green metal door.

The Dave in charge looked pretty unhappy to have two more randoms in his quarantine center. But he took down our names and had us thumbprint the ineluctable paperwork, then took us to the room where the people from the woods were. It was a man and a woman, midtwenties, with that taut, leathery look. Like a couple of jackrabbits after a hard winter. Also, they looked utterly bewildered.

Rhys tromped across the room without being asked, plopped into a chair, and put her boots up on a table. I stood by the door.

"You're different," the man said.

"Thank you," I said.

"No, I mean-"

"He knows what you mean," Rhys said.

I shrugged. "My name is JoeJohn. This is Rhys. We live here in the city, or on the outskirts. I guess they haven't told you much?"

They shook their heads. "We were talking about it," the woman said. "We think they're some kind of clones."

"We don't use the 'c' word," Rhys said.

"We call them 'Daves'," I said.

"But not to their faces," Rhys said.

"They call themselves 'Trustees."

The people from the woods looked more bewildered than before.

"Daves?" the woman said.

"From the original," I said. "You know, Dave Williamson? The billionaire inventor entrepreneur? The Genius of Our Age?"

The blankness of their expressions somehow increased.

Rhys waved in my direction; the various geegaws she wore as if they were bracelets clattered on her arm. "JoeJohn used to do the voices for Dave documentaries," she said. "That's why I brought him."

I came into the room and sat.

"Actually," I said, "I'm old enough to remember most of it firsthand."

EXCERPT FROM DAVE WILLIAMSON: THE GENIUS OF OUR AGE

Dave Williamson. Inventor. Entrepreneur. Adventurer. The Genius of Our Age.

We all know the face that The Founder showed the public, his tireless court battles to secure personhood for his genetic progeny, the first fifty men of Generation One.

We all thrive on the fruits of his genius, the robotic intelligence arrays and agricultural systems, the automated factories and renewable networks that make our modern life of leisure possible.

We all enjoy, as life members of the William-

son Trust, the inexhaustible wealth of his financial empire, the legacy of security that the Trust provides.

But what about the man?

CARLOS

And then the old guy was saying, "...the original Dave died of natural causes, and his first fifty clones inherited the Trust's assets, and we thought that was that. The most narcissistic vanity project in human history was done. But they had put a loophole into the Ackerman Act, so when they announced they were making another thousand clones, Generation Two—"

I looked over at Wendy and saw that she was also spacing out. The old guy – JoeJohn – stopped.

"Anyway," he said, "then the superflu hit. Almost the whole population of North America." He snapped his fingers. "Corpses stacked like cordwood in the hospitals. Europe is a wasteland. South America is in the stone age. We don't know anything about Africa or Asia, but nobody is trying to communicate from there."

"But some of us are immune," Wendy said.

JoeJohn nodded. "Asymptomatic carriers. Dave Williamson happened to have the same genetic immunity, and therefore all his clones do too. I could point out that Dave was the most brilliant molecular biologist of the twenty-first—"

The girl – Rhys – coughed. The two of them exchanged a look.

JoeJohn shrugged. "There are theories, but what's the point really? We all died. The Daves thrived. Inherited the Earth, as it were. A few hundred of us remain, gathered from the rest of the continent, surviving on the fringes of the city. With Generation Three they greatly outnumber us, and a fourth gen on the way."

I looked at Wendy and then down at my hands. I saw my wedding ring, like hers, made from braids of electrical wire pulled from the walls of the cabins. I saw the calluses on my hands from farming tools, the scar where I'd cut my thumb with the limb saw that time.

"A whole world of clones?" Wendy said.

"New Apogee is the first enclave," JoeJohn said. "But they have plans."

"They didn't tell us any of this," I said. "Did they send you to tell us?"

JoeJohn looked surprised. "Not at all."

"Here's the deal," Rhys said. She put her boots on the floor.

"If you're planning to go back to the woods and live on your farm, the Daves won't stop you. But if you're going to stay in the city, you need to make a living."

"One of the, uh, Daves told us that nobody has to work anymore," Wendy said. "With the robot farms and factories—"

"None of the *Daves* have to work," JoeJohn said. "They're all life members of the Trust, with fat stipends. The economy is all make-believe anyway, but they still make us pay our own way."

Rhys said, "A Trustee friend of mine asked me to talk to you. She's helped me out before, and some of my friends. They sent a crew up to your cabin to look around. They found your art."

"Our what?" I said.

"You know, the stuff decorating your house. My friend is pretty well-connected, she heard about it and..."

"What?"

Rhys looked me in the face. Her eyes were very blue.

"They want you to do a gallery show."

KATHERINE FIFTY-SIX WILLIAMSON

After my shower, I did my hair up in a really tight style that I wasn't used to, and then went to the closet to look at the dress again. It wasn't like the dresses I usually wear. It was black and formfitting, with long, severe sleeves and a square neckline. Like a dress worn by someone who was serious about business and art.

I put on the dress. The door chimed, and I went to the security panel. Darcy, James and Prescott stood on my doorstep, making silly faces at the camera. I let them in and we exchanged hugs, then I put them to work. Darcy had a plan to "unlock the flow" of the living room by moving my furniture around. Prescott helped James with the flowers. James is really a painter, but he does miraculous things with flowers. I went back to the bedroom to finish my makeup.

I felt extremely lucky to have them as friends.

They all knew each other from their crèche of course, but they had sort of adopted me at school, like the lost kitten. I didn't have any crèche friends because I was raised as an only child by my dads, which is not something that I always tell people. There's still a stigma, you know, one child occupying the resources of two fathers like that.

Anyway, the four of us created the *Memento Mori* artist conclave. Maybe you've heard of our big installations like 'Gadfly With Hemlock' and 'Horatio's Kismet', but our breakout piece was 'Woz Plucks Forbidden Fruit'. *The Journal of Neoteric Aesthetics* called that one "...a gamechanging exploration of current-decadent martyrisms through the lens of pre-pandemic hagiography."

But for us, it's not just about acclaim and bandwidth and awards. I know it's fashionable these days for artists to be filled with cynicism and ennui, but I really believe that we, who have so much, owe it to others to make something with what we are given. Art makes society better. I don't care if that sounds sentimental.

I had finished my eyebrows and was fastening on an obsidian teardrop pendant when I heard a retching sound from the kitchen. I rushed in and found Prescott holding James's head over the sink. James was spitting and coughing.

"What is that stuff?" he said, then gagged some more. He scooped water from the faucet into his mouth and spat.

I moved the platter out of his reach. "It's predemic food," I said. "Just keep rinsing."

"Damn," he said. "People used to eat that?"

WENDY

The first one was really hard. All we had was a couple of first-aid manuals, so something ordinary would happen and we would freak out. Like when I got hemorrhoids in the last month and we were sure I was going to bleed my guts out.

We knew the virus hadn't gone away, that it would only survive if it was born immune. We knew we'd lost brothers and sisters that way.

So this is how it goes. You carry this baby for months, and every day you're afraid, but you also hope, and because we were both immune, we knew there was a chance. Then she was born, and the first day everything seemed normal. But she never would nurse, and the fever came the second morning. And the coughing. You wouldn't think something so small could twist up so hard, with nothing coming out except a little blood. She coughed until she was too weak to cough anymore, and then she stopped.

The second one wasn't any easier. A boy. He was tiny. He didn't make it to the second day.

After that we didn't want to try anymore. We thought we were the last ones, and that was that. I mean, it's not just wanting to be like when we were kids, sitting with the family in the evening, reading or telling campfire stories, singing the old songs. It was also that you feel a sense of duty – to the race or whatever.

But it would have been too hard to go through that again.

So when we saw the robots, we figured the people who made them must have hospitals and doctors. We thought they might have found a cure, so that was disappointing that they weren't even trying anymore. But we knew that you can test, before it's born, you know, to see if it's immune. I mean, the Daves don't do much with natural birth anymore. Why would they? But they can do that. And then, if it's not immune, they can take care of it. Before it's born.

So when JoeJohn explained that only Trustees got doctors for free, Carlos agreed to do the opening. But it was weird. We were the first new people for years, and the first thing they thought of doing with us was to have an art exhibit?

When I pointed this out to Rhys, she just said, "These particular Daves are really into art."

Then JoeJohn said, "What else have they got to do?" But Rhys shot him a look, and he shut up.

A few days later, a box labeled 'For the Artist and His Wife' showed up at the quarantine center. It had a gray suit and matching dress – way too big, but we had our sewing stuff in our packs, so we pinned and basted ourselves together well enough. They were the first new clothes we'd ever had. One of the self-driving cars came for us, and we put on our old coats over our new clothes. Rhys and JoeJohn were already in the car, so we rode with them to Carlos's art debut.

RHYS

Not a chance. Keep moving.

KATHERINE FIFTY-SIX WILLIAMSON

Of course they don't have mobiles.

And I get it. I mean, they don't keep up with news or politics. And who would they be calling? And when had Rhys ever been on time for anything?

But it was pretty annoying at times.

I checked the security panel again. Just the empty street with no sign of the car. I smoothed the front of my serious dress, looked at my mobile, and went back into the reception.

A clump of junior administrators in their dark suits and committee lapel pins stood at the center of the living room. The techies had claimed the kitchen island. Prescott, Darcy and James sat with their drinks around one end of the dining table, and those NeoBaroque musicians in their frilly cravats stood with their thumbs in their waistcoats in front of the bookcase. The *Carpe Diem* conclave stood by the butler closet. I went to them first.

"Did the bar serve you everything you wanted, Tyler?"

He held up his drink. "I couldn't stump your software."

"And the buffet table? It wasn't too pushy?"

"It was a little officious about the vol-au-vents."

"So, Kath," Jocasta said. Jocasta always wore this thick purple eyeliner that made her eyes look half-closed. "Did I hear right that there will be randoms here?"

"You mean predemic people?"

"Predemic, yes," she said. "No offense. I mean, one sees them all the time, sleeping on the streets, digging in the trash dump behind the mall—"

"Well, these predemics are artists," I said. "They have homes and bank accounts just like everyone else."

Jocasta nodded. "Of course."

"They'll be here," I said. Then I turned and went over to Darcy, James and Prescott.

"Any sign of them yet?"

I shook my head and sat.

"And what are they doing here?"

I glanced over at the Carpe delegation.

"An olive branch?"

"They're probably just trying to stay relevant. After that trapeze fiasco—"

"Maybe they're afraid predemic art will trend."

"They don't want us to have it to ourselves."

My mobile chimed. I went and checked the panel, then opened the door.

"You made it."

Maybe that came out a little sharp, but Rhys didn't show that she noticed.

"We wouldn't miss it," she said. Her bright blue eyes. I couldn't help smiling.

"You remember JoeJohn?" she said.

I greeted the older man, and also the artist and his wife. I always forget how short most predemics are, JoeJohn being the exception. I put their coats in the bedroom and then led the four of them into the living room. When we stepped in, conversations died away.

"Thank you again, everyone—" I said, trying for the tone I'd practiced on the mirror "—for coming to the first of what I hope will be many openings for our newest outsider artist, Carlos Sandoval."

Polite applause.

"In a few moments," I said, "I'll open the gallery and you'll see the remarkable work that the artist has brought. As usual, everything is on silent auction, so I hope you brought your deepest pockets."

That got some chuckles. One of the Neo-Baroques snorted a little too loudly.

"But before we begin," I said, "I'd like to ask the artist to say a few words about his work."

I moved aside. He looked a bit startled at first, but recovered and then stepped forward.

CARLOS

It was a summer camp, you know? So there was stuff used for crafts, like tissue paper, glue. Glitter. My mom taught me things she did as a kid. Macrame bracelets. Potholders. Popsicle sticks.

We did crafts in winter when we couldn't go outside and I got fussy. We sat there on the floor with the snow piled outside and the light from the stove. She was really good at it. Way better than I am.

Anyway, after she died, I kept making stuff.

Just to pass the time, you know? Keep my hands busy. I guess it kind of piled up around the cabin. I never really thought about it.

KATHERINE FIFTY-SIX WILLIAMSON

He trailed off. After a pause, applause started and, while it was still going, I tapped my mobile. The walls opposite the kitchen split and rolled away, opening into the gallery beyond. Murmurs replaced the applause. The drama of the moment was just what I'd hoped for.

They moved into the gallery. The expanses of blank, white wall wore splashes of color, accordion-folded crepe paper flowers in vivid greens and pinks. God's eyes with hanging streamers of shells. Stamped leather bracelets. Painted rocks. Piñatas. A mosaic of a rooster in multicolored Indian corn.

The guests went in pairs and threes, pausing, pointing things out. A few tapped their mobiles, placing bids. I stood at the gallery entrance with the predemics. The old man, JoeJohn, his expression was hard to read. Their faces are all so different from each other's. Rhys wore her usual nonchalance, but the artist and his wife looked confused.

I leaned down and whispered, "They've never seen anything like this before."

The artist shook his head. "It's just the stuff from our cabin."

"That's what makes it fresh," I said. "It's sincere. Unselfconscious."

People drifted back out of the gallery. Several of them stopped to thank the artist and ask questions. Prescott, Darcy and James beamed. Another triumph for *MemMori*.

JOEJOHN

Then, after the big reveal and the formalities of spending money on art were dispensed with, the Daves got down to what they had mostly really come for: The serious drinking.

Our aboriginal newbies had only hearsay experience of alcohol, so I helped them get some watery, saccharine cocktails, which happens to be the specialty of Dave bars. Then I argued the bot bartender, against its better judgement, into

a double vodka rocks for myself. A couple of young Dave ladies came over to talk to me.

(And there was the usual moment of strangeness, of thinking they're not real. Girls were an innovation of Gen Three – an induced androgen insensitivity mutation. Girl on the outside, boy on the inside. Yet, they did have long legs and short skirts, and a charming way of sipping from their umbrella-festooned tumblers that gave one reason to want to forget...)

Dave girl one said, "We heard your voice and thought it sounded familiar."

"I used to act in films," I said.

"That's it," Dave girl two said. "I saw films when I was a kid. What ones were you in?"

"I was in over seventy films. Mostly historical pieces. You know, for the realism. My most successful film was *Napoleon and Josephine*."

"Were you Napoleon?"

I shook my head. "Alas, the leads always went to Trustees. Napoleon was played by a great jack of a man who could have swallowed three little Corsicans. I played Admiral Nelson."

"Who?"

"Horatio Nelson?" I stuck my arm behind my back and squinted at the ceiling. "Kiss me, Hardy."

Girl one said, "Who's Hardy?"

I cast an appealing look at girl two, but she shrugged. "We also wanted to ask you, what's the deal with the green food?"

"Green food?"

They pointed. I looked.

"That would be broccoli."

"Why is everyone saying not to eat it?"

"It will literally make you gag."

They looked skeptical.

"I'm not kidding," I said. "The original Dave Williamson was a supertaster."

"A what?"

"Supertaster. Couldn't tolerate any flavor that isn't sweet or bland. It used to be genetically rare, but now of course everyone has it. That's why you all drink vodka rickeys and pumpkin appletinis – to mask the alcohol flavor."

"I never knew that."

"What?" I said. "You never heard the tale of the young Genius of Our Age, when his affluent, worldly parents forced him to stay at the table until he had finished his vegetables?"

"What did he do?"

"Gagged them down. Claimed it taught him self-discipline. I suppose he got his revenge in the end, though."

"How so?"

I sighed. "When I was a kid, coffee shops actually served coffee. Grocery stores used to have all kinds of things. Pineapples, cabbages, olives. Now it's all ice cream and pie."

RHYS

All right. I don't talk about myself, but I stole most of JoeJohn's drink while he wasn't looking. So I will tell you something. It's something my mom used to say.

She would say, "There are two kinds of people in this world. People who believe you can know a man by walking a mile in his shoes, and people who don't have shoes."

Yeah, I know. Now go bother somebody else.

KATHERINE FIFTY-SIX WILLIAMSON

I was on my second White Russian when Jocasta and her coterie came over and said they had to leave. I went to get their coats. Digging through the pile on the bed, I came across Rhys's jacket. A tiny thing, shiny black plastic with a flowered lining.

My dads always yelled at me about snooping, and of course I know I shouldn't. But sometimes I just get this itch. I dug in her pockets.

A crumpled paper napkin with sketches of silly faces on it. A squashed tube of artist oil, terre verte color. An enameled metal case with – how could they stand those things? – handrolled cigarettes. A couple of finger-sized packets of sealed, yellowed paper. Something scavenged from pre-pandemic times. I squinted in the dim light to make out the faded print. 'Natural' what? 'Balance'? 'Feminine'? Then, I got it. I shoved everything back.

The coat fell on the pile, garish, like everything she wore. It lay with its flowered lining upward, splayed like a pinned butterfly. I saw the frayed label. Pre-pandemic.

Then it dawned on me. The flowers and stripes.

The lace. Everything nowadays is made to fit us. Scavenged predemic clothes were all she could wear, or else tween sizes. Probably the boots had something stuffed in the toes.

I gathered *Carpe*'s coats and took them to the foyer. After I said goodnight to Jocasta and her friends, James came over.

"Martin Seven is here," he said.

I nearly dropped my mobile. "Where? Where is he?"

CARLOS

We stood in a corner, sipping our drinks and talking with the Daves who came by to tell us how much they liked the art and stuff. Then Katherine waved for everybody's attention. Standing next to her was the oldest Dave we had seen so far. Older than JoeJohn even. And I looked over at Wendy and saw she was realizing the same thing – that this guy must be one of the first fifty, the Generation One. Some of the Daves wore suits with shiny lapel pins, and this old Dave had more pins than anybody. Katherine looked really pleased. Most everybody else looked kind of awed.

Then Katherine said that the old man didn't need an introduction, but she introduced him anyway as "Martin," and said that he had something to say.

MARTIN SEVEN WILLIAMSON'S IMPROMPTU SPEECH

As I told Katherine, I can only stay for a few words, which should please most of you. It is sometimes said that if a 'somniloquist' is one who talks in his sleep, then a politician is one who talks in other people's sleep.

(pause for laughter)

I am pleased to be able to visit this opening of *Memento Mori*'s Gallery. It may not seem like much, but up at the Trust this is the kind of thing of which we always take note. To paraphrase a great philosopher: Even though, today, all men are respected and materially well off, and though discomfort and disease have been reduced to their lowest possible point, there still remains much to be done in order to produce a

valuable society. An enduring civilization is not built merely by supplying the needs of the body, but by engaging with the needs of the mind. With their work, these young people are seeding the intellectual and aesthetic underpinning that nourishes a great civilization. Only in this way can we hope that the triumphs of the future may redeem the errors of the past.

Please join me in acknowledging the hard work and vision of *MemMori*.

(begin applause)

WENDY

While people were still clapping, Rhys came over and said, "I'm going to rescue JoeJohn, and then we're going out for air. Meet me at the coats."

JoeJohn was talking to a pair of lady Daves and didn't look like he wanted rescuing, but we went to the bedroom anyway. Rhys dragged JoeJohn in shortly, and while we were putting on our coats, we could hear Katherine in the foyer saying goodnight to the really old Dave. When he was gone, she stuck her head in.

"Not leaving already?"

Rhys shook her head. "We're just going for a smoke."

Katherine looked disappointed, and I was about to say that I didn't smoke, and neither does Carlos, but Rhys bustled us all outside. She took out a cigarette and gave one to JoeJohn, and once they had lit them she said, "So how are you holding up?"

Carlos said, "The party's fun, but—"

"What?"

"I feel kind of guilty. It's just stuff I had laying around the house, and they're spending money on it."

JoeJohn laughed. "They're playing hopscotch in the ruins. Who are we to stop them?"

"He didn't mention the art," I said.

"Who?"

My cheeks felt hot in the cold air. "The really old Dave. He didn't say anything about the art or about Carlos."

Rhys and JoeJohn exchanged a look. Then Rhys took a long draw from her cigarette and blew out the smoke.

"That's the thing you have to remember," she

said. "They will call you an artist, and they will give you openings and exhibits and spend money on your work." She looked at Carlos. "But never delude yourself that they'll accept you into their mainstream. To the Daves you'll always be a curiosity. A random artist."

JoeJohn had pulled, from somewhere, a mobile and was scrolling around on it. He held up the little screen for us to see.

"That's what you're getting for tonight so far," he said. "Kind of takes the sting out of it, eh?"

I bit my lip. "Is that a lot?"

JoeJohn nodded. "Enough to set up a house, a studio – and afford those doctors you wanted."

Carlos's hand went to his mouth. JoeJohn put the mobile away.

"Enjoy it while it lasts," JoeJohn said. "Tomorrow they might decide we're all a bunch of—"

"Oh, shit!" Rhys said, and whipped her head to the side. I followed where she was looking and saw a little glass orb beside the doorway.

"The camera," JoeJohn said.

Rhys threw her cigarette in the street. "Stay here." She went back inside.

KATHERINE FIFTY-SIX WILLIAMSON

I snapped off the screen and went back through the living room to the kitchen. Somebody spoke to me, but I didn't hear. I took the knife from the drawer and went out the side door and up the stairs to the roof. And then I sort of lost track of what was happening for a bit.

When I started thinking straight again, I saw that the poor broccoli plant lay in shreds all around the roof. I was holding the knife, looking at the big notch in the blade where it had hit the bricks. I was breathing so hard I felt like I was going to fall over. I dropped the knife and sank down on the roof. I put my face in my hands and my whole body clenched up and I just cried.

I heard the stairwell door squeak open, then slam. I heard the boots clomp across the roof. I felt the warmth when she sat beside me. She didn't say anything for awhile. She just put her hand on my shoulder.

The crying finally ebbed.

"Well," she said. "You've had a hell of a day."

I dropped my hands and looked at her. Her

eyes were such a bright blue, so different from normal eyes.

"You weren't supposed to hear all that," she said.

"I kind of figured."

She didn't say anything for a while.

Then I said, "I kind of hoped you guys thought I wasn't like the others."

Instead of answering, she took my hand and used her other hand to spread my fingers. She interlaced her fingers with mine. I saw the different-colored flecks of paint caught in her ragged cuticles. Then she turned our hands over and I saw my manicured nails, freshly polished. Her hand was tiny. My hand was like everybody else's.

She let my hand fall and we sat there for another minute.

I said, "I don't know what you want from me."
"Well, I don't remember asking for anything,
but—" She shrugged. "Between friends, a plate
of broccoli goes a long way."

She stood up. "Come on."

She walked to the edge of the roof to the, I guess it's called a 'parapet,' and I followed. We looked out toward the river, over the ribbons of streetlights of the rebuilt parts of the city, threading between the dark and ruined parts. Downriver where the lights stopped, a cluster of scattered orange lights gleamed from the oil lanterns in what they call 'Randomtown'.

From below, I heard voices. Carlos and Wendy singing, in different keys, a song I'd never heard before. And JoeJohn joined in – haltingly, as if remembering the words – in the parts about how this land was your land, and also my land. And Rhys and I stood there and we looked out where the moon shone down on the fields, on the turnip plants, like endless copies of the same clump of leaves, marching in staggered ranks for acres down the riverbank.

Tom Greene is a biracial Anglo/Latino science nerd from Texas who moved to New England in the 90s to study British Literature. He lives in Salem, Massachusetts with his wife and two cats and works as a full-time English professor and part-time lecturer on vampire literature. His stories have been published in *Analog, Polluto, Strange Horizons, McSweeney's* and elsewhere. Visit his website at www.advancedhypothetics.com.

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edited by Isiah Lavender III

SCRUPFIANS RHAPSODY Hal Duncan



THE CAUSAL ANGEL Hannu Rajaniemi Gollancz hb, 304pp, £20

To be honest, I'm not fond of epigraphs. Authors quoting from other literary works at the start of their novel generally strike me as either clutching onto somebody else's coat-tails or, worse, trying to be clever. To be fair, though, Hannu Rajaniemi doesn't have to try to be clever; he is. Nor, as he made clear with his debut *The Quantum Thief*, does he have to hold onto anyone's literary coat-tails; he has set a new standard for science fiction that dares to imagine a post-human future.

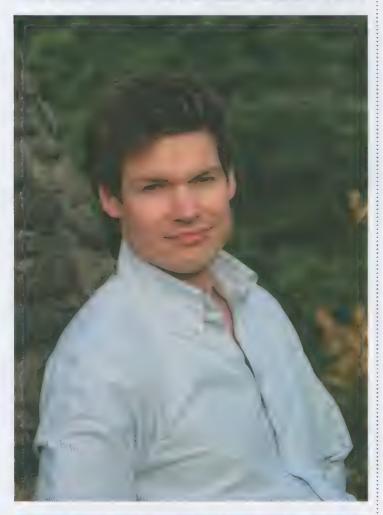
So why the epigraphs? They are certainly a disparate selection: French author Maurice Leblanc, whose gentleman thief Arsène Lupin has been frequently mentioned as one of the trilogy's main inspirations; A.S. Byatt's 2012 translation of Ragnarok: The End of the Gods; and E.E. 'Doc' Smith, often called the "father of space opera" thanks to his Lensman and Skylark novels. Disparate, perhaps, but in hindsight they undoubtedly delineate this concluding novel in his debut trilogy: fin de siècle heists, the impending end of the world and a habit for things to be really, really BIG.

While the second novel The Fractal Prince successfully built on Rajaniemi's narrative foundations to add a greater depth to his characters - notably the gentleman thief Jean de Flambeur and futuristic warrior Mieli - and widened the environments in which they operated, The Causal Angel very successfully concludes the underlying story arc while still delivering a few surprises and unexpected twists. Given that this novel essentially starts with both Earth and Mars being destroyed, it's no mean trick to be able to convincingly 'build' to a climax of genuinely solar system proportions.

Following closely on after the cataclysmic events that brought the second book to a close, Rajaniemi expertly shapes a novel that, while requiring concentration and a good memory (and possibly a certain Wikipedia page listing the main characters and scenarios close to hand), continually rewards with its ideas, imagery and heart-felt tale of two people's determination to do the right thing in order to remain true to who they once were. Which, when you're dealing with biological and/or digital copies and the potential to reshape yourself almost at will in this postsingularity universe, isn't always as easy as you might think.

Like any finale, The Causal Angel can feel a daunting read jumping into this novel is certainly not recommended without having read the first two - in part thanks to Rajaniemi's continued strict adherence to a lean, 'show, don't tell' approach to wonderfully baffling future technology and layers of reality which are offered up largely without obvious context. Yet the succinctness of his prose - the only image of Jean de Flambeur which lingers in your mind is that he pinches his nose at times of stress - is often beautiful

HANNU RAJANIEMI CAUSALITY AND RESOLUTION



BEVIEW AND INTERVIEW BY PAUL F. COCKBURN

in its minimalism; for example, the almost incomprehensible nature of one character is aptly summarised in 'her' name: "Anti-de-Sitter-times-a-Sphere".

If the first two books had fun presenting Rajaniemi's future solar system and its often bizarre, god-like inhabitants to us, *The Causal Angel's* place as third and final novel in the trilogy requires much more focus, as plot lines are gathered together and the machinations of various characters – not least the All-Defector, notably glimpsed in the earlier books – comes to the fore. As planet-wrecking forces gather for a major confrontation, and plans arise to reorder the universe entirely, Rajaniemi's skill is in ensuring narrative closure without an obvious wilting of reader excitement. There's barely a

moment's pause from first page to the last, and both the author and his characters taking matters very seriously.

There's still plenty of fun to be had, though. Rajaniemi doesn't hold back on some wonderful set-pieces, such as the scene where Jean de Flambeur successfully steals back his old ship, the Leblanc, from a mind-boggling armaments collection. But such things are not just there for the spectacle; though a thief by inclination, he's nicking the ship as part of his machinations to save Mieli and also rediscover himself. Despite all the bluster, Jean de Flambeur is sufficiently vulnerable in this novel to really engage our empathy, if not our sympathy. He's a much-more rounded character as a result.

Despite all the weird and wonderful things in the novel, the Zoku trueforms and virtual worlds within virtual worlds through which the reader is pulled, inevitably dazed and stunned, it's thanks to its characters that The Causal Angel lingers longest in the memory, no mean feat given some of their evolutions and almost mythical transformations. But then, Rajaniemi is a very clever and talented writer. Which, presumably, means that his work will be appearing as epigraphs sooner or later.

Are you relieved that the Jean de Flambeur trilogy – begun with *The Quantum Thief*, continued in *The Fractal Prince*, and now concluding in *The Causal Angel* – is 'done and dusted'?

Writing a trilogy does take a long time. I started the first book in 2008, so it has been a number of years spent with that world and those characters. But I wouldn't say "relieved". Kind of satisfied is a better way of putting it.

There's a little bit of melancholy associated with it as well, letting

go of those worlds and those characters, but I'm keen to move on to other things.

I've been very pleased with the response so far. It's nice to see that people are finding it a satisfying ending, which I was a bit worried about when I was writing it.

How challenging did you find the experience? Did you manage to keep to the plan you started out with?

I think the broad strokes were pretty much as originally planned; the ending more or less approximated what I had in mind from the start. There were all sorts of meanders down paths along the way, but it ended up where I thought it would, in some sense almost surprisingly so.

The challenges were much more related to the main blocks of the story and plotting characterisation, and that sort of stuff. In the beginning the challenge was also just working out how to write a novel – that got a little bit easier as I progressed. Just having some sense of how long a novel actually would be, that was something to discover as well.

Usually I find the most difficult part of writing a novel is the middle, but with this final one I struggled more at the beginning, in terms of just how to set it up and what threads to really pick up from. So there was a slower writing period than usual at the beginning but, after I got past that, it picked up. There was some inherent momentum in the story; the job of the third book was to see where that goes.

Looking back, are you satisfied with the pacing of your story across the trilogy?

Part of the effect I was trying to achieve was how the story was quite frantic. In hindsight book two (*The Fractal Prince*) might have been a bit longer, but on the



"Part of the effect I was trying to create was a sense of this somewhat bewildering and hugely complex post-singularity world, where it really is different from anything we know"

whole I haven't sat down and read the whole thing from the start, so I might discover something if I did that.

To what extent did you have to consider that some readers might be picking up this novel without having read the first two? I kind of assumed that people would've read the first two. I did put in some context for the odd new reader who might come along, but I was probably writing more for the audience who has read the first two.

Do you think much about those readers while writing?

I think I was fundamentally writing the novels for myself but, of course, it gave me some confidence in the process to know that there were people out there who had similar preoccupations and interests as I did, that there was a readership who clearly enjoyed it and even a separate readership who didn't necessarily get so deep into the detail, but were still able to enjoy the novels at a purely storytelling level. That did actually help.

It's not as if you've ever gone in for massive amounts of infodumping. A defining feature of the three books is your enticing lightness of touch when it comes to post-singularity context. Was that just for these three books or is that how you write in general? I like writing short stories where you need to compress things quite a lot, so that may be related to my style, but it was also a stylistic choice for these three books. Part of the effect I was trying to create was a sense of this somewhat bewildering and hugely complex post-singularity world, where it really is different from anything we know.

It just did not seem natural for there to be much explaining, and I wanted to actually try to pack a lot of the ideas into it, in almost every page, to give this sense of what Phil Spector called the Wall of Sound; where you have many, many instruments that blend into this almost white noise, where you're not necessarily meant to absorb every detail. So that was what I was going for. I may or may not have been very successful, but that was the idea!

The fin de siècle novels by
Maurice Leblanc are frequently
stated as an influence on these
books. Did you have any specific
influences on *The Causal Angel?*There are certainly some influences that were there all through
the trilogy – Leblanc, Roger
Zelazny, Iain Banks – but for each
book there were also some deliberate influences that I sought out.

There was a cataclysmic, endof-the-world undercurrent to the
third book, so I looked for things
related to that. One book that I
think I found particularly useful
was A.S. Byatt's recent retelling of
Ragnarok, the Viking myth about
the end of the world. Another
influence was E.E. 'Doc' Smith,
the creator of space operas with

these ever-escalating destructive machinery and cosmic scale.

I have a background in tabletop live role playing games, so
there were actually some specific
independently published role
playing games that I looked at. The
Mountain Witch, which is a role
playing game about the Samurai,
has a very interesting relationship
between storytelling and gaming.
I also read a history of Dungeons
and Dragons. It didn't end up
being a direct influence as such,
but it was interesting!

Another important book was A Theory of Fun, by game designer Ralf Koster. It's about how our brains adapt to play games, and how games are effectively these reworked reward/punishment mechanisms which teach us to recognise certain patterns. He very much sees all games as learning experiences, and one aspect of that is that once you've mastered a game, you've learned the lesson.

So what's next for you? Are you walking away from the Jean de Flambeur universe for a bit? Yes. There are quite a few short stories that could be set in that world, but I probably need some time away from it before I come back. My next book contract (with Gollancz) is for three stand-alone novels, so no trilogy, these will be three books that are all different.

The one I'm working on at the moment – I've been working on it for about the last six months – you could describe as ecto-punk: ecto as in ectoplasm, and punk as in steampunk. It's kind of an alternate history world where some of the ideas of 19th century spiritualism turn out to be true.

Actually, you can already see very clearly some of the same kinds of ideas that people, who are today preoccupied with the singularity and uploading, share with some of the really strange people around in the 19th century.



THE GHOST IN THE ELECTRIC BLUE SUIT Graham Joyce

Doubleday hb, 288pp, \$24.95

Elaine Gallagher

This is a very difficult review. As I write it, Graham Joyce has died a few weeks ago of cancer. I only met him once, but I admired his work greatly. The Ghost in the Electric Blue Suit is the US edition of his last novel, The Year of the Ladybird, published in the UK in 2013.

The novel is set in 1976, the vear in which the UK suffered a summer of exceptional warmth and drought. David Barwise is a university student, taking up a summer job in a holiday camp in Skegness. While he is there, he is embroiled in the relationships between the staff members, in fascist politics, and in two romances: one with a beautiful dancer and the other with the wife of a dangerously violent and possessive man. He is also haunted by the vision of a man wearing a blue suit, and a little boy.

The novel is grounded solidly in the characters, and the milieu of the decaying British holiday town. The holiday camp as an institution was already on its way out in 1976, killed by low-cost package holidays and cheap flights to Spain. The people who work in the camp are the kind of misfits, die-hards and second-stringers who have ended up there as the tail-end of a career

in seafront pier entertainment. It would be easy to make caricatures of them, but they are the sad originals of such comic characters as were portrayed in the TV show Hi-de-Hi!, made less than ten years after the novel is set, and of clichéd jokes about the real-life Butlin's chain of camps. Skegness itself, a seafront holiday town with piers and fortune-telling machines, is shown to have seen better days. There is sun and sand and peeling paint, and the era of the naughty postcard is over.

Behind the scenes of the holiday camp are petty graft and jealousies, vicious politics and thuggery. Tony, otherwise known as Abdul-Shazam, the camp's magician and chief entertainer, is an organiser for the National Front, a fascist group which was becoming powerful in the UK in the seventies. Colin, a taciturn man who takes a liking to David and looks after him with money and advice, is an enforcer for the group. Nikki, one of the dancers and entertainments assistants is of mixed race and hates the others' racist politics. Terri, Colin's wife, has a beautiful singing voice which her husband never allows her to display and who also keeps her under a close guard. David, a somewhat naive university student, has to negotiate these characters, as well as the raucous banter of the staff women who work the canteens and the glowering aggression of the boys who work as labourers, and are skinhead NF supporters at the weekends.

The supernatural is also low-

key, as in many of Joyce's novels, and it would be possible to read the hauntings as hallucinations arising from David's stressful and dangerous liaison with Terri. The sense of menace builds up from early on, with David's parents' unease at where he has taken a job, their refusal to explain why they are disturbed, and the eerie familiarity that the location has for him. The plagues of ladybirds which occurred in that year and which gave its name to the UK edition of the novel. also build in strength as nature adds to the growing tension of David's increasingly dangerous relationships and the growing threat of the hauntings.

At the same time, the cheer of the holidaymakers, the children playing in the organised games of sandcastle competitions, pirate hunts and donkey races, their parents at the evening entertainments and the bars, is vivid and engaging. Some of the loveliest passages in the book are depictions of the day-today activities of working-class people determined to enjoy their week in the sun. These make the hauntings, when they irrupt briefly into the holiday fun or the romantic idyll with Nikki, all the more unnerving and significant.

I loved this book. The voices of the characters, the feeling of the year 1976, when racial tensions were erupting into political violence and a post-war way of life was ending, taking with it the camp and surrounding town, are all note-perfect. There is a sense of melancholy and fraying glamour about everything that is described. In the end, the novel is about letting go of the past, coming to terms with it and moving on. I think it is a terrible shame that we will not have any more novels from Graham Jovce, but it is a beautiful one to have finished with.



GRAHAM JOYCE (1954-2014): writer, teacher, socialist, greencoat and explorer of the liminal

A chubster's appreciation by Andy Hedgecock

In autumn 2001, I interviewed Graham Joyce at his home in Leicester for *The Third Alternative* and the conversation drifted onto the London-centric nature of publishing and the challenge this presents to writers based in the provinces. Graham expressed deep irritation at a publisher's reader who suggested his new book, *Smoking Poppy*, would struggle to find an audience because it was about "fat people from the industrial Midlands".

"Oh fuck," I said, "I'm a chubby object of limited appeal." Graham took a copy of his book from a shelf, wrote on the title page and set it aside.

If you're beguiled by the paradoxes of Graham Joyce's stories, you should have met the man himself. His conversation, like his books, lurched from profound to playful and back again. When we met in spring 1998, just before the publication of his sixth novel, *The Stormwatcher*, we talked about socialism, liminal experiences and Bion's work on the psychology of group dynamics. Then, somehow, we drifted onto Keresley Newlands

Primary School's victory in the final of the 1965 Coventry and District Football Shield, Graham was the team's goalkeeper. Later. at the age of 52, he became goalkeeper for England Writers, an experience he captured in Simple Goalkeeping Made Spectacular (2009), runner-up for William Hill Sports Book of the Year, Football mattered to Graham: he once had a heated argument with Louis de Bernières about its historical role in bringing artistry, passion and "a bolt of electricity" into the lives of people who lacked the opportunity to access other forms of culture.

Graham, who was intensely proud of his roots, once said: "I've taken a conscious decision to explore the lives of people who are still ignored by a majority of writers." He enjoyed his success, but expressed sadness at feeling "educated out" of the environment and culture into which he was born. The sense of erasure that comes with the getting of wisdom is a key theme of The Tooth Fairy (1996), one of Graham's most popular books. Set in Redstone, a fictional version of Graham's west midlands hometown, Keresley,

it blends a sharply observed and touching rites of passage story with a narrative strand concerning a mythic being that represents the creative and destructive aspects of the unconscious. The book leaves an aftertaste of limitless possibility and a tang of melancholy. In a talk at the University of Derby in 2010, Graham revisited the notion of cultural displacement as collateral damage in the quest for enlightenment. At a particularly poignant juncture he veered into an acerbic anecdote about the psycho-sartorial trauma experienced at a poetry awards event. Graham claimed the sight of a fellow poet in socks and sandals was responsible for derailing his promising career in poetry.

He had a gift for shepherding seriousness away from solemnity. One minute he spoke about fantasy as a para-rational approach to mapping the human psyche, the next he delivered a cutting impersonation of a famous football manager. The same tendency is evident in his writing. Indigo (1999) blends traditional elements of horror, folk myth and detective novel to explore corrupted dreams, dangerous eroticism and the quest for the numinous, but the mix is leavened with idiosyncratic humour and witty evocations of characters, locations and events.

Graham made everyone laugh, but no-one doubted the intensity of his commitment to his craft. He told his students: "Writers don't have a life, they sit in a room making up other people's lives and it's bloody hard work." But behind the graft there was a sense that fiction can be a form of magic, a quest to create symbols and metaphors that work unconsciously to open up new understanding of human experience and potential. For example, on one level The Stormwatcher is a

tense tragicomedy of manners; on another it highlights the controlled chaos beneath the veneer of social order in lateperiod capitalism. Graham examined the absurdity and insignificance of society's obsession with hierarchy, authority and acquisition by setting human affairs against the backdrop of a "nine mile high theatre of weather". The satirical elements of the book are subtle and open to interpretation: Graham's lifelong socialism, based on an instinctual sense of fairness and compassion, informed all his work but he never turned off his readers by bolting polemical passages into his narratives.

From his first book, Dreamside (1991), to his most recent, The Year of the Ladybird (2013), Graham's fiction melded accessible storytelling with philosophical speculation. Early books such as Dreamside, Dark Sister (1992) and The Tooth Fairy reworked the wellworn techniques and traditions of popular genres. As his writing became more sophisticated, in books such as The Stormwatcher and Indigo, the supernatural elements became subtler and the symbolism more complex and ambiguous. Set during the postwar rebuilding of Coventry and layered with meticulously detailed period background, The Facts of Life (2002) is regarded by many critics as Graham's masterpiece. The book could have been read as a literary novel, but the supernatural powers of the key protagonist, a child conceived during a bombing raid, led the book to be classed as an understated dark fantasy. Graham couldn't have cared less how readers approached the book, as long as they read it from cover

The Limits of Enchantment (2005), a tale of a troubled young girl and her adoptive mother, a hedgerow midwife, wanders even closer to the literary mainstream. There's a ritual of alleged psychic transformation known as The Asking, but the focus is on the way everyday events, ordinary places and unexceptional people are invested with symbolic resonance. And yet, once again Graham conjured magic at the limits of perception. The Limits of Enchantment is a moving, gripping and underrated novel.

Elaine Gallagher's review of The Ghost in the Electric Blue Suit (2014), known as The Year of the Ladybird in the UK (2013), captures the deceptive richness of Graham's final novel, a powerful portraval of an era of discontent. a picaresque adventure and a love story. Like his narrator David, Graham worked as a 'Greencoat' at a miner's holiday camp in Skegness in the mid-1970s. He often shared anecdotes about the experience - none of them as unsettling as the events in the book. A scene of high misadventure involving a National Front meeting is one of the funniest and most disturbing he ever wrote. David's haunting, by a glass-eyed child and a man in an electric blue suit with a face of smoke, may be real or a product of psychological disturbance, but it doesn't matter which interpretation the reader allows. The book is an exhilarating exploration of a period that played a formative part in Graham's life and shaped the psychic landscape of contemporary Britain. It's a wonderful epitaph for one of the finest storytellers of our era.

At the end of our interview in 2001, Graham and I said goodbye at his front door and he shoved the copy of *Smoking Poppy* into my hand. I opened it as I walked back to the car. The inscription on the title page read: "For Andy, a good Midlands chubster." It's one of my most treasured possessions.



MY REAL CHILDREN Jo Walton

Corsair hb, 320pp, £19.99

Paul Kincaid

The alternative lives of women, that portion of the twentieth century experience obscured by patriarchal attitudes, has suddenly come to the fore in twenty-first century literature. Kate Atkinson dealt with the issue triumphantly in Life After Life, and now Jo Walton follows suit in Mv Real Children. The differences are instructive. Atkinson's novel was written with a mainstream sensibility but an awareness of science fiction; Walton writes out of a science fictional sensibility but with an awareness of the mainstream. Atkinson began (repeatedly) with birth and cast her story forward from that point, each new experience of life bringing its own surprises; Walton begins at the end of life, and casts her story backwards through memories.

In fact, the best chapter in Walton's novel is the first one, in which an old and befuddled Patricia Cowan struggles to retain her dignity in a nursing home while trying to come to terms with experiences that seem disjointed and incoherent. For a brief moment

the novel hesitates, allowing us to read these dislocations as a manifestation of Alzheimer's disease or as two diverse timelines vying to be recalled. However, as soon as Walton identifies a turning point, the moment when Patricia either accepts or rejects a marriage proposal, the book resolves into a much more conventional story.

She is a bright Oxford student in the immediate post-war years who takes a teaching job, but her aloof boyfriend fails to get the degree he anticipated and calls her with an ultimatum: marry me now or never. When she replies 'now' she enters into an unsatisfactory marriage in which she raises four children but is otherwise disappointed in life. When she replies 'never' she develops a passion for Italy, writes a series of successful guide books, and enters into a long and loving lesbian relationship.

The two lives, recounted in alternating chapters, are familiar enough in outline: conventional married life is stultifying; independence is liberating. But the story Walton tells isn't as simplistic as that.

A woman's life in mid-century is shown to have been limited by design. As a married woman, Tricia is unable to continue her career as a teacher, and with an unsupportive husband finds herself struggling to keep the home and raise her children without any escape. But as the marriage finally falls apart she is able to return to teaching, whilst campaigning for various good causes and eventually getting into local politics. Walton is careful to show the satisfactions even among the limitations. Gradually, also, we come to realise that the post-war world that Tricia is living through is not quite the history we recognise. The United Nations pulls the plug on the British and French adventure in Suez before it even gets going: as a result the Western nations are

not distracted during the Hungarian Crisis and Russia pulls back. Slowly the world starts to follow a more peaceful, less confrontational path, and by the 1970s there is a permanent base on the moon with one of Tricia's children the first person to get married there.

Pat, meanwhile, faces limitations in her own life. In particular, as lesbians there is no official recognition of their relationship, so she and Bee face the prospect that their children might be taken away from them, and when Bee is seriously injured by a terrorist bomb it is even difficult for Pat to get in to see her in hospital. This time, also, we see that the history unfolding around them is different again. The Cuban Missile Crisis ends with nuclear bombs exploding in Miami and Kiev; later China and India also use nuclear weapons against each other. The moonbase in this world is of Soviet origin and part of a tense military standoff.

In other words, an unhappy life for Tricia is matched with a happy world; a happy life for Pat is matched with an unhappy world. This equation is raised but, perhaps sensibly, not pursued by Walton, though the binary opposition of the two worlds can be a little too studied at times. The book is well written if somewhat sentimental towards the end, the characters are vividly draw though there are so many names that it can become difficult to keep track of who's who and in which world, and there is a strong and heartfelt message conveyed by the novel. As a confident literary exercise it is head and shoulders above her Hugo-winning novel Among Others, and yet, because we know the ending of her different lives right from the start, because the range of lives is limited to two, I couldn't help feeling that My Real Children isn't quite as daring as it should have been.



TOMORROW AND TOMORROW Thomas Sweterlitsch Headline pb, 352pp, £13.99

Barbara Melville

Tomorrow and Tomorrow is a near-future dystopian novel set ten years after the Pittsburgh disaster, an explosion killing half a million people.

Our narrator, the troubled John Dominic Blaxton, lives his life across two sinister worlds. The first is reality as we know it, where his wife Theresa died in the blast along with their unborn child. The second world offers a digital 'Archive' where Blaxton revisits memories of his wife, an experience enhanced by sophisticated drugs and technologies. The main technology is 'Adware', a brain-bound device allowing the internet to merge with the senses and be visualised as if part of the local landscape.

As you can imagine, these two realities overlap vividly, and the result is a striking story of grief, truth and contradiction. In fact, if I were to sum it up in a sentence, I'd say this book is so close to perfect it makes me sick.

The story is huge, making it

difficult to boil down in a review, but in short Blaxton investigates the murder of a young girl found by a river, using the Archive to both gather his evidence and revisit his wife.

The world echoes the plot, offering a bleak and terrifying depiction of our over-stimulation in the present digital age and the web's incomparable ability to log information forever. And it works. With its solid cyberpunk prose and social commentary of modern America, it shares sensibilities with William S. Burroughs and bumps shoulders with Don DeLillo.

On top of all that, the story has excellent characterisation and narration: Blaxton is sensitive but strong, the ideal vessel for the theme of grief, with his love for his late wife aching on every page.

Of course, there's no such thing as a perfect novel, and there is a notable problem: the book's detail is both a gift and a curse. Rich, beautifully-written descriptions cover much of what Blaxton observes. Now, I know many science fiction readers thrive on detail, whether it has to be there or not, but for me there must be a reason. Is there? Yes and no.

Let's start with the yes. Blaxton has an investigatory role, so if he's good at his job – which he is – he needs to be observant. He also enjoys poetry, which I'd hope would make him curious. So far, so good. There is also essential world-building and social commentary in these descriptions, including a theme of advertising, aesthetics and sexual objectification:

"...we pass through Dupont Circle, every building facade a fashionporn billboard...paradise after paradise. Every storefront tempts me – it looks like there are parties behind the show windows, rooms filled with models in slinky skirts sipping martinis and laughing, but there aren't parties in there, it's all Adware marketing, illusions."

Again, it makes sense someone living in a world driven by adverts would be preoccupied with how things look. So if the descriptions are essential, what's the problem? There's too much: the book is saturated with them from start to finish. This is challenging, but I feel a book about sensory overload shouldn't cause sensory overload. It really starts to grate around 200 pages in when we're familiar with the world and the Adware and don't really need it for the plot. While it needs to be there for the sake of consistency, some kind of extra purpose or narrative device is required to keep it interesting.

There are also some details that shouldn't be there at all – like the number of internet 'pop ups' he sees. No matter how observant he is he wouldn't report on everything, just as we probably don't notice every detail of our own online experiences.

But, what a story.

I'm tempted to say just ignore that last paragraph: just ignore the mean reviewer lady with the pedantry, because overall Sweterlitsch gets it right. As one of the characters points out, "the truth lies in contradictions".

This for me sums up why this book works so well overall. The vast array of complex characters show that evil can be good, just as an interactive internet is both a blessing and a burden. But perhaps above all, the key contradiction is the past. The past can be a sweet, safe place to exist. The past can inform us, helping us to solve problems. But at the same time we mustn't spend our days reliving and grieving what we cannot change. Whether we like it or not, we're always moving forwards.

Sometimes we need a push to remember that.



BÊTE Adam Roberts Gollancz hb, 320pp, £16.99

Jack Deighton

We know from the epigraph, "You? Better. You? Bête" — attributed to Pete Townshend but given Roberts' own slant — that we are in for a tale full of word play and allusion; everything from Led Zeppelin lyrics to the riddle of the Sphinx, with nods to previous SF (at one point there is the shout "Butlerian Jihad!") as well as Animal Farm.

The novel begins with dairy farmer Graham Penhaligon, who has also trained to butcher his own livestock, having a verbal disagreement with a "canny" cow which does not wish to be slaughtered. This is shortly before such Loquacious Beasts (as the Act has it) are to be legally protected. The encounter makes Graham famous. after a fashion. The advent of speaking animals had come with green activists "creeping around farms in the dead of night, injecting chips into the craniums (sic) of farm animals". These bêtes at first spouted authentic sounding phrases, responses of animal rights propaganda, but quickly the chips, by now AIs, develop into

something more integrated with their hosts.

It is tempting to find faint echoes in this set-up of Wells' Dr Moreau but the comparison is too stretched to be truly viable. No vivisection is involved; the chips only have to be ingested to make their way into the host's brain. Graham reflects that Moore's Law made this sort of augmentation inevitable but he never believes that the animals are really expressing themselves; it is the computers in their heads doing so. Soon enough bêtes become legal citizens competing with humans for jobs. Along with the almost simultaneous development of synthetic Vitameat, one of the ramifications is that Graham's farm is no longer viable.

He resorts to a nomadic existence, taking the odd slaughtering job, living (poorly) off the land, his peregrinations bringing him into irregular but recurring contact with Anne Grigson, with whom he falls in love. She has a canny cat, Cincinnatus, which loves its mistress but also exhibits a peculiar interest in Graham.

Graham is prickly from the outset. "Don't call me Graham," he tells the argumentative cow and nearly everyone else he meets thereafter. He is especially so with the bêtes he encounters. These internet enabled, wifi-ed animals recognise him instantly, but there is always a hint of menace in it. A shambling incoherent human appears to know Graham but has been chipped; with "higher" animals schizophrenia is the unerring result of such a merger. Dogs, cows, horses are much more suitable.

This scenario gives Roberts scope to comment on humanity's collective relationship with the biosphere, sometimes through his minor characters – "Animals have feelings and thoughts – it's just that only now have they been

able to bring them out" – otherwise through Graham's thoughts – "Speciesism is more deeply entrenched within us than sexism, and that is deep enough", "Nature: it's not *nice*, it was never *nice*. Niceness is what we humans built to insulate ourselves from – all that". Cincinnatus provides the barbed observation "Misrecognition. It's what humans are best at".

At times Bête takes on some of the characteristics of the postdisaster stories associated with British SF of the fifties and early sixties. Also stalking the land and causing AIDS-like panic is the disease Sclerotic Charagmitis, where mucus membranes scar over, leading to death. The countryside is abandoned to the animals, people huddle together in the larger towns, the regime becomes repressive, but shuts off the wifi too late. There are tales of inter-species war in the north, animals immolated on pyres by the army. In his isolation, Graham does not witness any of this, though.

But Anne dies from cancer, and Graham reflects that the loss of love brings resentment, bitterness, anger, envy. Fair enough, but I don't quite buy his contention that, for adults, crying is always a performance, intended for an audience. The crux of the novel comes at Graham's delayed meeting with the leader of the bêtes in the south, an AI in the brain of a very old ewe known (in a piece of somewhat heavy-handed symbolism) as The Lamb, which makes him an offer.

While the essential motor of the plot is that this is a love story, Graham's relationship with Anne does not come over like a grand passion. Everything is a touch too intellectual; described, not experienced. *Bête* is good stuff, though, probably enough to ensure Roberts' usual award nomination.



CHAIN OF EVENTS Fredrik T. Olsson Sphere hb, 425pp, £18.99

Duncan Lunan

Spoiler Warning: it is impossible to review this novel without giving away what it is about, and how it ends. Because Chain of Events is constructed as a thriller, the 'MacGuffin', the big secret which it is about, is not central to the plot as it would be in hard science fiction; and if you've seen Knowing, the big revelation half-way through Chain of Events will not be the shock that Olsson intends it to be. An ancient text has been discovered which lists the major events of modern times, and predicts two more, the last apparently the same as the end of Knowing. It turns out not to be the same, but that's so near the end that anyone who's seen the film thinks they know what's going to happen, indeed might think this must be the book Knowing was based on, for almost all the second half of the novel.

The ancient text is not discovered in a time capsule, but encoded in human DNA itself. I could guess where the idea came from, because I happened to read *Chain of Events* just before

Richard Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker*, which says "there is enough storage capacity in a single human cell to store the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, all 30 volumes of it, three or four times over... The 'meaning' of the symbols in any information technology is arbitrary, and there is no reason why we should not assign combinations of DNA's 4-letter alphabet to letters of our own 26-letter alphabet...", or in this case, cleverly, to the cuneiform alphabet of ancient Sumeria.

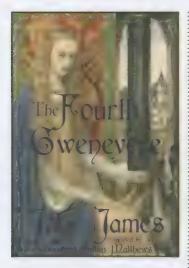
For the information to be in everybody's DNA, it must have been implanted in the cell nuclei of a common ancestor (perhaps 'Mitochondrial Eve' herself, the supposed 10,000th grandmother of all living humans 200,000 years ago in East Africa, though as Ian Stewart and Jack Cohen pointed out in Figments of Reality, actually 'she' had to be a much larger group of women, all of whom would have to be modified to be sure of passing on the message). Who could have done that, and why, and (apart from the convenience of mapping cuneiform into a 4-letter code) why would they use Sumerian, 195,000 years before its time, itself 5,000 years before the events described in the message? But those questions don't interest Olsson: they're discussed only to say they're unanswerable. The message exists, people who know about it must be killed to prevent a panic, and so we go on with the abductions, murders and bombings which have taken up the first half of the book.

So to the actual plot: before the predicted "huge and violent fire" with which the message ends, there is to be a terrible plague. An international organisation has been set up to do whatever is necessary to prevent the plague and preserve the secret, and its location and methods are very like Heydrich's in Harry Turtledove's

The Man with the Iron Heart, my first review for Interzone. They try to rewrite the message with viruses, but they're all deadly, and then (partly because of the secrecy) their security is so full of holes that one of the viruses gets out. The plague erupts, the mass panic ensues, and like the villain of The Da Vinci Code, the organisation goes on hunting and killing people to preserve the secret when there's no longer any need to do so.

Although highly contagious, the plague dies out because people scatter from towns and cities, and know how to avoid infection. The great fire destroys the organisation's headquarters, not the world, and civilisation recovers. So transcribing the message into DNA (which would take man-centuries, according to Dawkins) serves only to make it come true, and destroy the organisation which it has brought into being. It's like the prophecies in Macbeth, except that we know who made those and what their purpose was. This exercise has no more purpose than 'the ultimate machine' which Arthur C. Clarke described in Voice Across the Sea: the one that "does nothing, absolutely nothing, except switch itself off".

For thriller readers, the chase and its outcome may be enough. They're well done; I read John le Carrés A Most Wanted Man along with Chain of Events, and there are definite similarities in style - detailed descriptions of places, for example, to build up a feeling that something significant is happening, while the reader doesn't yet know what's going on. The MacGuffin is sufficiently science-fictional that it might even lure readers into reading SF especially if they would like to find out What It All Means. But regular SF readers may be seriously disappointed that Chain of Events doesn't say.



THE FOURTH GWENEVERE John James

Jo Fletcher Books, 28opp, £20.00

Maureen Kincaid Speller

In the late 1960s John James published three extraordinary historical fantasies set in the Roman and Dark Ages: Votan and its sequel Not for All the Gold in Ireland follow the travels of Photinus the Greek merchant in Britain and Northern Europe, making clever use of the Norse myths, the Mabinogion and the great Irish epics. Men Went To Cattraeth draws on Y Gododdin, an epic tale of doomed warriors. In the mid-seventies came The Bridge of Sand, in which Juvenal leads Roman soldiers in an attempt to conquer Ireland. All four novels were characterised by the sheer rude vigour of their telling, their narrators springing from the page to buttonhole the reader. James's characters were lovable rogues but also men of honour, who did what was needful, no matter the odds. No one told a story quite like John James.

And now, belatedly, we have one last novel. The Fourth Gwenevere was left incomplete at James's death in 1993, and it is thanks to the diligence of a fan, Penny

Billington, that James's children located the computer files. According to the Matthewses, who then took on the task of editing the novel, more than two-thirds of it already existed and from what was there they felt able to provide the rest. Who wrote what precisely is not stated, which is frustrating because this last novel is not the seamless whole the editors and publisher obviously intend it to be. However, neither can I tell whether the shift in register from his earlier novels comes about simply because James is here an older writer, or because the previous novels underwent a polishing process that is inevitably absent this time around, or because the presence of the Matthewses as writers is a little more intrusive than one might hope for.

The main story is narrated by Morvran, "the ugliest of the Three Ugly Kings of Britain, an admitted bard, King of Gwent and Prefect of Caerwent, ruler of all men from Ross to Avan". Morvran, as is typical of James's narrators, presents himself as a simple man beset by idiots, but it is obvious that he is clear-sighted and the person everyone else looks to when complex matters need to be dealt with. On this occasion, the unity of Britain is at stake for Arthur has been assassinated, the many kings of Britain are squabbling over the succession and Gwenevere, vital to this process, has seemingly been abducted. It falls to Morvran to find her and bring her home.

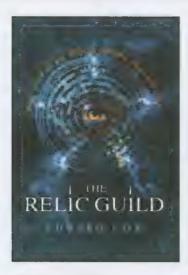
This is familiar territory and none the worse for that. Morvran drags his reluctant band of men out of England and into Gaul, threatening dire punishments for those who disobey him but unwilling to sacrifice them to what has become his personal *gesa*. And it is obvious that his men would follow him to the ends of

the earth, grousing as they went. We see too the making of Arthur's legend, somewhat at variance with the truth as witnessed by Morvran, but a remaking that even he recognises as necessary in order to preserve the kingdom.

The journey is for the most part worth the taking, even if there are places where the humour seems more strained than I recall, or the plot a little thinner than I'd like. The more liminal moments too can seem a little lacklustre though the description of the countryside ravaged by the White Plague, the cities standing empty, is spine-chilling. And there are one or two elements in this story which are so unlike anything I've seen elsewhere in James's work that I do wonder about their provenance.

And unusually for James, there is also a second narrative thread. with parts of the story told from the point of view of the Fourth Gwenevere herself, in sections interpolated between the main chapters. According to the editors some of these were in the material they received from the family but their presence in the text seems awkward, as though they have straved in from elsewhere. One can only surmise that James was, commendably, attempting to redress the necessary absence of the Fourth Gwenevere within the main story. Yet one can't help wondering if the novel remained unfinished because James struggled to reconcile these two narrative elements. I wonder too about the Prologue, again somewhat out of character.

Given that this novel comes as a late bonus, it seems churlish to criticise, but I would be lying if I said that this is vintage James or, as the editors claim, his best novel yet. It falls a little short of that but enough persists of what made James's earlier novels so wonderful to make *The Fourth Gwenevere* also worth the reading.



THE RELIC GUILD Edward Cox Gollancz hb, 400pp, £20.00

Ian Hunter

"Wham bam, thank you, ma'am", or maybe in this case I should say "Van Bam, thank you, Mr Cox", but moving quickly on from this abuse of David Bowie lyrics, I'm glad to say that in the opening pages of The Relic Guild we are straight into the action. In 'An Epilogue' entitled 'Doubt and Wonder' an assassin and wild demon, and one of the last of the Genii, Fabian Moor, makes his way through a vast cavern where winged creatures would like to feast on him, towards a rendezvous with the fellow leaders of Lord Spiral's armies, all defeated by the Timewatcher and her own army of thaumaturgists at various colourful locations such as the Falls of Dust and Silver or the Burrows of Underneath. The world believes them dead, killed in battle, and while physically they will soon be gone, their souls will be uplifted thanks to the help of the wizened man in the box known as Voice of Known Things, to be there when needed. The battles have been lost, but the war continues and

Lord Spiral is playing the long game.

One thing you'll gather from that short description is that Cox is good with names of places and characters, but he has more strengths than giving labels to things, such as creating characters and his own unique worldview.

The fast pacing continues as we encounter Peppercorn Clara, who has blood on her hands – literally – having killed someone, possibly to save her own life, not that it matters, because she clearly has something of the night about her and might be that rarest of things, a Changeling, with thoughts of being a wolf running through her head.

The blood that runs through her veins is virtually priceless given its magical properties and is essential when used for the proper rituals. It might open doorways that have been closed for decades and it might even bring the dead back to life or cause the return of the Genii.

Thus, Clara finds herself on the run through the part of the Labyrinth known as Labrys Town with a price on her head, and legendary bounty killer Old Man Sam, a former member of the disbanded Relic Guild that once protected the city from the use of magical artefacts, dogging her footsteps. He carries a rifle powered by a jewel charged up to make a killing shot, and he never misses.

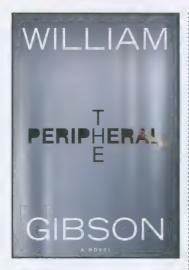
He is not the only one pursuing her – another member of the Relic Guild is on her tail, as well as the police force, and those are just the least of her worries.

Part science fantasy, part steampunk thriller, part horror novel (just look at way Cox mashes together those old tropes of vampire, zombie and golem, and has the interesting touch of having the Resident, Van Bam, being haunted or, perhaps, possessed by the abusive ghost of his predecessor), *The Relic Guild* reads in places like a vividly-described high fantasy merged with Victorian penny dreadful appenings with its backdrop of trams, rooftops, sewers, back alleys and goods yards and a slightly bumbling police force (why did I think of the Keystone Cops at times?) who are being drip-fed the merest of information to do the bidding of the Resident who runs Labrys Town and sees the bigger picture.

The plot of *The Relic Guild* unfolds over twenty chapters, but interspersed between them is a secondary narrative, telling the story of what happened to a previous incarnation of the Relic Guild forty years earlier. Sadly, some of the old members of this protective force do not make it into the present, but they certainly are a colourful bunch in both time-frames, especially Hamir the Necromancer.

Cox has written a mighty fine first novel, although it is not perfect – there is maybe too much info-dumping going on, and although it didn't bother me in the slightest, I could easily see that it would bother others, along with the fact that there is no real conclusion here. And why should there be? We are clearly in "to be continued" territory, with perhaps a touch of the "with one mighty bound [insert name of character here] was free".

There was also perhaps too much familiarity with our world – in one place the empath, Marney, remembers a lost love, a poet and musician that she went "gigging" with – but I can say no more than I was hooked and enjoyed the world that Cox has created and the characters that inhabit it, and look forward to stepping into "the darkness that leads somewhere else" and see what waits on the other side in book two.



THE PERIPHERAL William Gibson Viking hb, 496pp, £18.99

Andy Hedgecock

The Peripheral is William Gibson's eleventh novel. In terms of its structure and energy it has much in common with his early Cyberpunk classics Neuromancer, Count Zero and Mona Lisa Overdrive - the Sprawl trilogy. In terms of its vision and range of concerns it shares more features with his later, more sophisticated stories. In the three decades since the publication of Neuromancer Gibson's work has matured: for example, Pattern Recognition (2003), widely seen as Gibson's masterwork, used a science fictional frame of reference to explore the complexities and absurdities of contemporary work, relationships, globalisation and power.

In a way it's as if The Beatles, having completed Sergeant Pepper, decided to apply a wider range of tools and techniques, a more confident command of their craft, to the ideas and styles they used in Beatles for Sale. Gibson has returned to the themes of kleptocracy (the abuse of corporate power); lives enriched, and simultaneously constrained,

by artificial intelligence and computer networks; and menacing urban landscapes, real and virtual. And he has used a technique he popularised in the Sprawl trilogy: switching between originally disparate, but eventually converging, narrative threads and character viewpoints.

This isn't without its problems: it takes around twenty of the book's concise and event packed chapters to get to grips with settings, characters and periods. Gibson throws down a gauntlet to his readers by setting stories in separate but linked time continua, and pitching them straight into the middle of the action in both strands of the narrative. There is little exposition and the flimsiest of frameworks is put in place to support understanding of the worlds he has created. The difficulty is exacerbated by the massive range of neologisms and faux buzzwords the author employs - some amusing, others pointless and slightly irritating. At one point I wondered if I would complete the book - I felt Gibson's attitude to me as a reader was "keep up or piss off". Would I have hurled it aside if it wasn't by Gibson?

It's worth persevering with Gibson's tale of a crime that can be solved only through virtual time travel. The story shifts between Flynne, living in a trailer park in America's Deep South in 2020, and Netherton, based in London seventy years later in a decadent post-apocalyptic world. When Flynne's brother subcontracts her to beta-test a simulation game for the shadowy Coldiron Corporation, an organisation existing in the future (in Netherton's time) she witnesses a murder while embedded in simulated space. The time paradox inherent in this aspect of the story, and the possibility of communication between 'then' and 'now', adds a further layer of

narrative complexity, but this is handled very deftly.

The book is packed with five-minutes-into-the-future technologies – command and control implants, directive tattoos, 3D printing on demand, nanotech and the 'Chinese Chair', a piece of furniture that interacts verbally with users and morphs to fit their form. A key feature of Gibsonesque sf is that, in spite of the author's wittily contrived and baroque invention, his people, places and stories have a smack of familiarity about them.

The Peripheral keeps intact William Gibson's reputation as the master of the terse, multi-threaded and richly loaded narrative driven by lively and convincing dialogue. It also seems to mark a significant reconciliation with the sf genre. In a recent literary biography of Gibson (University of Illinois Press, 2013) Gary Westfahl suggests there is an apparent paradox at the heart of the author's later work. With the publication of Pattern Recognition (2003), Spook Country (2007) and Zero History (2010) Gibson seemed to believe it was impossible to write sf any longer. At the same time, argued Westfahl, we all need sf more urgently than ever to stand any chance of making sense of our world. The Peripheral seems to exhibit a renewed faith in the ability of sf to deal with the most anxiety-inducing aspects of the modern world – corporate power struggles, out of control oligarchies, military adventurism and cataclysmic psychological shifts mediated by rapid technological change.

Entertaining and infuriating, challenging and provocative, *The Peripheral* is a welcome addition to the oeuvre of a writer who respects his readers, values sf and, time after time, tells stories that enable us to understand rapid social, economic and technological change a little more deeply.



MIND SEED edited by David Gullen & Gary Couzens

T Party Books pb, 202pp, £7.99

Jo L. Walton

Nine stories, mostly originals, by members of London writers' group the T Party. The anthology is in memory of Denni Schnapp, who died in 2013. An introduction by Denni's husband John Howroyd tells us a bit about her life. The last story, 'Mind Seed', is her own.

Perhaps there are two kinds of tale of possession. One kind is all about craving a uniform community. It's about fear of interlopers, fear that others are secretly fundamentally different to you. Helen Callaghan's 'Sex and the Single Hive Mind' is closer to the second kind. It's about craving plurality – desiring to become, under the rubric of compassion, fundamentally different from yourself. It's an engaging, agile opener, sparkling with sleaze rather than polish.

Fox McGeever's 'Evolution' is post-apocalyptic survivalism pared down for parable-esque force. The protagonist Cara is all alone, save some invasive xenomorphs and a wombful of weird son. The indistinct mechanisms of apocalypse – silver ships and

white fire - convey an aura of rapture and end-times. Like any parable worth its salt (of the earth), 'Evolution' accommodates many interpretations. It could just be about the remorse of isolated young parents, trying to live up to their received ideas about what Nature intends. It could be about humans' eternal capacity to adapt, and yet also to evolve new chauvinisms, new borders. In one aching image, Cara sleeps beside her husband's body, waking with one hand on her bump and the other on his chest: this story could be about the ethics of creating new humans when there is no world left to nourish them.

Rosanne Rabinowitz's 'Living in the Vertical World' is pieced together from real ingredients of that crumbling world: maybe Bosco Verticale in Milan plus a crumb of Occupy, a crumb of Maker hipsterdom, a crumb of malevolent Monsanto IP litigiousness. It finishes on a "what-would-you-do?" and hints at the relationship between social bonds and foundational acts of violence.

So far I make Mind Seed sound very serious. But it's also great fun. Ian Whates' 'Darkchild' is the prisoner of a dread trinket, a sort of Cthulhic desk ornament timewaster. You wonder: is the puzzle is solvable? Water dripping somewhere is Darkchild's only stimulus. A drip suggests chaos theory. Obviously to escape, Darkchild must solve this non-linear function: but how to input her answer? Via varying the rhythm of her foetal-pose back-and-forth rocking of course!

Deborah Walker's myth-like 'The Three Brother Cities' doesn't give us a critique of the creeping surveillance requirements of the contemporary smart city, so much as the sublime thrill of cosplaying Cair Paravel or Gormenghast or Ambergris (...in space!). If my eyebrows weren't zotzed by all that rocket thrust, I might cock one at the hokey gender dynamics of Owton & Couzens' pleasantly mercurial, Golden Age-ish 'Rockhopper'. Any stasis pod stowaways who awaken in the 23rd Century, don't fret! - it's still 100% fine to slip into something more feminine and melt into a nearby burly chest. But listen, if you thought 'Rockhopper' was the biggest jolt of gee-whizz space opera retro you're likely to guzzle all year, that's because you haven't yet read Markus Wolfson's 'Alien Invaders'. It's a heady cocktail of unload-my-space-pistolright-in-your-tentacles capers, pulpier than a pineapple, with a twisty straw of what-if-the-truemonsters-are-dot-dot-dot-us?

There are patterns in this anthology. There's a lot of First Contact. There's fruitfulness, verdant abundance. No story is explicitly elegaic, but many – and above all, Schnapp's own 'Mind Seed' – take acceptance for their theme. With humour, bluntness, and effervescence, 'Mind Seed' tells the tale of Leia's cancer treatment by full brain emulation and of her sister Zif's transition from anti-cyborg hold-out to cyborg and, ultimately, to interstellar voyager.

Several stories unite an immoderate intensity of desolation with an equal intensity of hopefulness. Nina Allan's 'Bird Songs at Eventide' is one gorgeously honed example. Humanity manifests in a detached, almost hardboiled manner. Whimsical associative shifts are deployed with clinical precision. The prickliness of the prosody, and the sumptuousness of sense-data, are self-consciously inadequate compensation for a loss without any clear boundaries: loss of a lover's love, of a planet, of something. Meanwhile, the living cosmos teems.

Profits from the anthology go to Next Generation Nepal, an antichild-trafficking charity supported by Denni Schnapp.



BLACK AND BROWN PLANETS edited by Isiah Lavender III University Press of Mississippi hb, 254pp, \$60

Stephen Theaker

Subtitled The Politics of Race in Science Fiction, this book aims to show "what SF criticism means when joined with critical race theories and histories of oppression". Part one, Black Planets, concerns African-Americans and sf. Lisa Yaszek introduces the idea of 'The Bannekerade: Genius, Madness, and Magic in Black Science Fiction, explaining how Benjamin Banneker's life has inspired stories of "black technoscientific genius". The essay identifies several interesting works, but it's not clear that there are many distinct examples of the Bannekerade.

In "The Best is Yet to Come"; or, Saving the Future: Star Trek: Deep Space Nine as Reform Astrofuturism', De Witt Douglas Kilgore writes about the episodes that threw Commander Sisko into the life of a black writer in the fifties, and wonders whether Star Trek's racism-free future is as positive as you'd think. In 'Far Beyond the Star Pit: Samuel R. Delany', Gerry Canavan reads that story "as an allegory for life under the regime of legal and customary segregation

known as white supremacy".

As well as the introduction,
Lavender writes 'Digging Deep:
Ailments of Difference in Octavia
Butler's "The Evening and the
Morning and the Night", where he
suggests Butler's story can be read
as an allegory for race in America.
In 'The Laugh of Anansi: Why
Science Fiction is Pertinent to
Black Children's Literature Pedagogy' Marleen Barr argues that
children's sf featuring black heroes
"causes a wrinkle in time, a respite
from the history of oppression".

Part two, Brown Planets, ranges further afield, though surprisingly not to India ("Africa and Asia are beyond the scope of this collection").

In 'Haint Stories Rooted in Conjure Science: Indigenous Scientific Literacies in Andrea Hairston's Redwood and Wildfire' Grace Dillon explains how that novel incorporates "indigenous scientific literacies, a forwardthinking way of characterizing indigenous knowledge in opposition to Euro-Western characterizations of 'native superstition' and magic". In 'Questing for an Indigenous Future: Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony as Indigenous Science Fiction' Patrick Sharp makes similar points, while comparing post-apocalyptic narratives with a novel about a town affected by uranium mining.

The view of science put forward in those essays seems almost Victorian, all taxonomies and determinism. In 'Monteiro Lobato's O presidente negro (The Black President): Eugenics and the Corporate State in Brazil', M. Elizabeth Ginway explains how science earned that bad reputation, using a 1926 "chilling fictional experiment in genocide" to illuminate the Brazilian eugenics movement. A highlight is Lobato's honest surprise that no US publisher wanted his racist book.

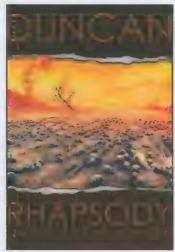
In 'Mestizaje and Heterotopia in Ernest Hogan's High Aztech' Lysa Rivera reads Hogan's novel as a science fictionalization of José Vasconcelos's theory that Mexico's melting pot might eventually produce a cosmic "fifth race" to lead us into enlightenment. Matthew Goodwin's 'Virtual Reality at the Border of Migration, Race, and Labor' critiques the notion of cyberspace as post-racial utopia, considering, for example, how it provides cheap labour without allowing immigration. In 'A Dis-(Orient)ation: Race, Technoscience, and The Windup Girl' Malisa Kurtz applies the concept of "raced" characters, who may not face problems relating to their ethnicity, but are marked in other ways, such as Emiko's built-in physical stutters.

Though it's a reprint, 'Yellow, Black, Metal, and Tentacled: The Race Question in American Science Fiction' is worth reading first, as Edward James provides a useful overview of how American sf has tackled race (or not). It gives context to the more tightly focused essays, though his concerns about "the problem of the recognition of race in SF" – the risk of assuming sf is about race and not, say, technology – aren't shared by many contributors.

In 'The Wild Unicorn Herd Check-In' Robin Reid notes the variety of fans who asserted their presence after Racefail, and catalogues how they described their ethnicity and nationality. It addresses the book's title: "white readers of SF ... simply did not see all the planets (black and brown and many other colors) that exist and have existed, independent of white observers". Like "new" planets now being discovered, minority readers and writers of sf were always out there. Black and Brown Planets does a terrific job of bringing more of them to our attention.



SCRUFFIANS
Hal Duncan
Lethe Press pb, 210pp, £12



RHAPSODY
Hal Duncan
Lethe Press pb, 282pp, £20

Matthew S. Dent

The nice thing about story collections is that they give you a better sense of an author's range, the will to experiment and try the odd ideas which maybe won't work out, but which sometimes can. There are a cluster of stories contained within Scruffians: Stories of Better Sodomites reminiscent of Peter Pan's lost boys, who are adolescents trapped in their prematurity form, living on the outskirts of society and culture.

The opening story, 'How a Scruffian Starts Their Story', serves as a neat introduction both to this world and cast of characters. It is the tale of an outcast adopted by a tribe of these immortal outcasts, and through that newcomer Duncan expands on this world he has created. This is a theme continued over the following few stories, fleshing out a world which, whilst clearly Duncan's own fantasy, is open and inviting, with an unusually rich tapestry of hints and greater references to elements yet to be explored.

Writing a series of short stories in a shared world like this is no

mean feat, especially in making them seem like short stories rather than the disembodied chapters of a novel-in-progress. Duncan achieves it, through approaching each story in a different mode, from a different angle. We have straight-played introductions, exposition of characters, ankles flashed at a secret history backstory, and even a full-blown re-interpretation of a fairy tale.

What it produces is an intriguing, if oddly dispersed, piece of work, of which I hope there is more to come.

But Scruffians also contains stories not connected to the shared world, and one of these was, I think, my favourite.

'The Island of the Pirate Gods' is a blend of pirate yarn and Shakespeare's The Tempest. Which, I will grant you, is not among the first combinations that come to mind. But it works. Two pirates come upon Prospero's island long after the conclusion of the bard's play, one searching for an island haven for freed slaves, the other for the mythical island of the

pirate gods. What they find, of course, is neither, but rather an adventure with fairies and a tale of love and pirate sexuality. Very compelling.

'Sic Him, Hellhound! Kill! Kill!' is another brilliant little story, of a werewolf and his 'handler' hunting down vampires. It's classic SF material, but shows both a cultural awareness and a warmth of storytelling which lifts it beyond the standard stock. And amongst the other stories here it really shines as effective use of the genre.

Rhapsody: Notes on Strange Fiction is a different beast entirely. A collection of essays, digging beneath the surface of the fantastical. I find it, actually, difficult to review something like this, if I'm completely honest. This isn't fiction, obviously, and whilst I don't agree with all of his opinions and analysis, it is clearly reasoned and well-thought out to the last.

Of particular strength is the first essay, where he eschews the traditional brief introduction for a fantastically detailed examination of "what is SF?" It's a big question. They are *all* big questions, and they are tackled fearlessly. That alone deserves respect.

But it is the open-mindedness which Duncan brings to his fiction which really makes this worth reading. Not in one sitting perhaps, as I can attest – his language is creative, but a little on the heavy side – but to dip in and out of as suits the mood.

And when I look at the two books in tandem, there is a clear trend here. Duncan is a brutally honest writer, but with a beautifully honest flare. Language is like putty in his hands, and though I didn't revel in every story or essay, I can appreciate the aesthetic and technical prowess contained within. Which is a suitably long-winded and flowery way of saying I rather liked both of them.

LASER FODDER TONY LEE

BONES

SPACE STATION 76

RITE

BED SHIET

FILMED IN SUPERMANIONATION

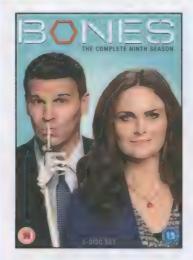
GODZILLA

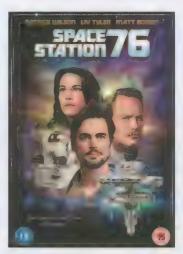
THE HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD MAN WHO CLIMBED OUT OF THE WINDOW AND DISAPPEARED

DEBUG

THE DAY THE EARTH

OUT OF THE UNKNOWN







Created by Hart Hanson, BONES (Season 9, DVD, 15 September) was inspired by Kathy Reichs' novels about a forensic anthropologist named Dr Temperance 'Bones' Brennan (Emily Deschanel). David Boreanaz portrays FBI agent Seeley Booth, a former US marine sniper with strong religious beliefs which place him at odds with better educated scientisthero squints that help catch the killers in a paradigmic cop-show scenario. Constructed with tightly woven plots, Bones perfectly blends character-driven comedy, fascinating science lessons, and regularly features human remains

– in the field or in tech labs – where many grisly corpses offer a stronger element of revulsion than is found in this show's main, frequently icky rival, *C.S.I.*

With its cleverly speculative mortuary-lab gear and ghastly spectacle of biological decay, Bones sits right on the fringes of mundane SF/modern horror, and revels in a somewhat perversely witty humour, such as in this season's episode about surrogate pregnancies, which includes king-of-the-lab entomologist Hodgins, happily hosting a parasitic botfly larva to 'enjoy' the subsequent 'birth' experience. Creative tension between







forensic facts and fictional crimes are explored in many imaginative stories supported by the "authority and realism that academic and scientific credentials bring to this specific genre", and (in a meta-fictional twist) Dr Brennan's somewhat autobiographical mystery novels are about 'Kathy Reichs'. Such quirks are the proverbial saving grace of Bones. Whereas most other cop shows tend to lapse into soap opera mode whenever they switch from the professional arena to the personal lives of central characters. Bones avoids sentimental asides, and often draws upon the idiosyncrasies of sitcom as a counterpart to the considerably darker aspects of its crime-drama aesthetics. This odd balance works quite brilliantly to maintain the show's entertainment levels instead of diminishing them with the maudlin coping mechanisms of soap-opera routines. When featured in Bones it is more than just comic relief, it becomes a way for investigators to deal with all the disgusting horrors and noirish tragedies they confront on a regular basis. Gallows humour worked for popular TV sitcom M*A*S*H, and it works just as well for Bones, too.

Although, over the years, this production has softened the heroine's initially-radical atheism (no god, no souls; bibles derided as 'magic books'; debunks fraudsters for fun), Brennan maintains a secular philosophy and keenly sceptical thinking that drives her approaches to practical sciences, solving cases, and working or personal relationships. Fiercely intellectual, with an independent streak to match, her character is assertive regarding the unreliability of detective partner Booth's more instinctive approach to investigations, not to mention scoffing at the psych insights of supporting character Dr Sweets. ("We're scientists...not ruled by hysteria, fuelled by ignorance.") Brennan's lack of any social graces makes her seem to be the epitome of a 'crazy genius' but, as a learned polymath, it is an unwavering rationality that guides her towards admirable humanity.

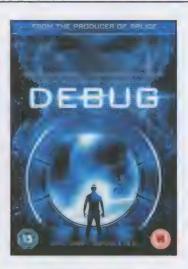
Traditional sci-fi morality gives way to tolerance for all, but injustice. A story about the faux tribal mentalities in street gangs exposes misplaced loyalties that result in social tragedy as ignorance is forced upon a child by urban warlords. Facially-scarred serial killer/hacker Pelant (returning

after last season's cliff-hanger) is a comicbook genius of Mabuseish stature who serves adversaries cryptic clues that lead all the way down the rabbit hole. The mastermind's intrusion on Brennan and Booth's wedding plans proves to be his undoing, of course. The love-conquers-all episode fields an ironic fairytale affect.

Such timely issues as identity theft, cancer, jury duty, and cannabis use help to ground varied offbeat science (cryogenics muddy murder case timeline), hokey (Nazi gold macguffin), and nightmarish (Brennan dreams of burial alive in bone-vault chaos) scenes in cold-light-of-day traumas, or first-world problems, but not all the dramas here are energised by middle-class angst. Horrific death of the season, and clearly an earthly hell: a car-wreck survivor is drowned in a septic tank. Despite all of its clinical grue, a general absence of violence onscreen distinguishes Bones from most of its cop-show rivals, whether they are science-based or not. However, there is major danger in the season's climactic gunfight, which follows discovery of a high-level conspiracy - of Hydra proportions - in the federal government.









Based on a stage play, Jack Plotnick's SPACE STATION 76 (DVD, 6 October) is a 1970s soap opera with orbital neuroses, a lowbrow sci-fi sitcom of patriarchal incongruities, as chauvinistic Captain Glenn (Patrick Wilson) condescends to maternal newcomer Lieutenant Jessica (Liv Tyler) before he is outed as gay by the blonde airhead named Misty from planet Valium. Trek deck hardware combines with Spaceballs parody, but roboshrink Dr Bot steals the show. Dark Star did this type of comedy much better in the actual 1970s. SS76 is merely a trite, largely colourless attempt to spoof that era's sociopolitical ethos in terms of issues-based characterisation striving for progression. It prompted me to re-watch episodes of Space 1999, because I didn't remember Gerry Anderson's liveaction series being this lifelessly dull.



An ultra-violent sci-fi comicbook movie, sprayed in cartoonish shades, KITE (Blu-ray/DVD, 13 October) is a Luc Besson-styled live-actioner derived from an anime source. Sweet-looker Sawa (first leading role for India Eisley, from Underworld: Awakening) is like a tactical pixie in disguise, a clockwork peach, an orphaned junkie and assassin on a covert mission to clean up the urban wastelands, while searching for the gunman that murdered her parents. Hooked on the drug 'amp', while under tutelage of spooky state-security Lieutenant Aker (Samuel L. Jackson, still exuding colder 'Fury'), Sawa's Nikita in Sin City act crashes through parkour chases and electrifying stunt fu, saving innocents from predatory

gangs but learning the hardest lesson that vengeance burns all concerned with its darkest fiery impulses.

Ralph Ziman directs this relentless thriller as a winning blend of genre themes, borrowing slick energies from Hong Kong's cult classic Naked Killer (1992) and Zack Synder's gloriously contrived fantasy Sucker Punch (2011). However, essentially, Kite is a sexy cyberpunk movie. Its post-crash cityscape (filmed in Johannesburg) reeks of exploitation and slavery. It's a movie of reheated clichés and hackneyed plotting but it looks fabulous, with a chilling sense of youthful rage and a feel of designer morbidity that's almost rebellious enough to save it from its own narrative insignificance.





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Adapted from Alan Garner's fantasy novel of 1973, RED SHIFT (DVD, 13 October) was a featurelength contribution to anthology series Play For Today (1970-84). Directed by John Mackenzie, two years before he made The Long Good Friday, this timewarp drama spans a millennium - from 1978 to a 17th century civil war massacre to Roman Britain - but all three stories are set in Cheshire, where the ancient hilltop ruin at Mow Cop sits at the centre of tragic events that appear predestined. Teenagers find a stone axe of apparently magical Neolithic power that somehow links Tom and Jan to cursed couples in historical and distant pasts, confronting situations of violence, while psych problems afflict Tom, who experiences a strange awareness of ambiguous/

undefined nature. Are memory engrams independent of time? Can love save or salvage troubled souls?

Unlike the supernatural presence of Nigel Kneale's classic TV drama The Stone Tape (1972), there are no ghosts found in these set-pieces of pasts and present. There is not much actual fantasy either, beyond a bleeding through of events from different ages. However, Lesley Dunlop is fine as the feisty heroine, and the supporting casts in the olden times include James Hazeldine (The Omega Factor, Chocky TV trilogy) and Michael Elphick, both turning in notable performances. This BFI release of neglected genre TV is welcome of course, but a DVD boxset of short-lived spin-off SF anthology Play For Tomorrow (1982) seems long overdue.

When I was a little boy I wanted to be Thunderbird 2. Not the pilot, Virgil Tracy, you understand, but the huge green flying-brick transport itself: blasting off the launching ramp into foreign skies, hauling cargo pods of amazing vehicles on daring adventures, and altruistic rescue missions when/wherever danger (criminal or accidental) looms, and saving the day, if not the world. Just like a superhero. Following Supercar (before my time), Fireball XL5 and Stingray (filmed in Videcolour), the nuclear Thunderbird 2 was a machine-as-protagonist icon that captured my sci-fi boggled imagination like nothing else before it. Gerry Anderson's puppet TV shows were family favourites, and the darker themes of Captain Scarlet made it probably the very best of them but even hokey episodes of Thunderbirds had a charming quality that favoured repeat viewing. FILMED IN SUPERMARIONATION (DVD/

SUPERMARIONATION (DVD/Blu-ray, 20 October) is a great documentary by Stephen La Riviere, derived from his own illustrated book (Hermes, 2009). This is a captivating history of how the Andersons' (Gerry and Sylvia were a unique TV team) eccentric yet pioneering work changed the

face of telefantasy in the 1960s and, along with it, the structure and aims of the British home entertainment industry as a whole.

With interviews, including rare archive material, faithful recreations of specific sets, props, and puppet characters (a witty double-act of Penelope and Parker playing meta-fictional 'hosts' for this reverential retro feature is inspired), FIS is a fascinating look into the backroom creativity of all those miniature worlds. Often lauded as a sci-fi 'visionary', Gerry Anderson's true genius was in bringing together so many talented people, and allowing them to overcome narrative barriers with innovative techniques.

The contributions of special effects master Derek Meddings and superb theme music from composer Barry Gray were exemplary to say the very least. The enduring appeal of the Andersons' series, especially of the mid-1960s period (Stingray, Thunderbirds and Captain Scarlet), operates on the level of proverbial nostalgia for our lost futures, as we mourn - yet still celebrate happily - a 21st century that is long since relegated to dreamlands. From the humblest of mercenary beginnings, the Andersons built a mini-empire producing super series of impressive quality and exquisite, matchless artistry.

Bundled with FIS, second Bluray disc This is Supermarionation collects eight episodes from Anderson's puppetry programmes. It's a fine telly sampler, but a minor shame that Fireball XL5 is not represented by a colourised episode A Day in the Life of a Space General (available separately on Blu-ray). The debut episodes of Stingray and Captain Scarlet in particular are still tremendously good fun, and so well worth seeing again. TAG, FAB, SIG, A-OK...



Gareth Edwards' version of GODZILLA (DVD/Blu-ray, 27 October) clearly takes its preposterous kaiju lore seriously, without an ounce or gram of kitsch in its genre drama. As MUTO beasties feed on reactor radiation and snack on nuclear submarines. the king of all monsters rouses from a deep ocean lair to hunt/ crush a pest spawned by ancient Earth. Of course, "the military has a plan to deal with these things" is already the canon cliché of famous last words in the Japanese mythos of Gojira, ripened here for 21st century WOT relevance. The SF-horror show presented is quite impressive in its epic scale of briskly retold events, spanning the postwar arms race and generations of what's laughingly called progress by industrial nations.

Godzilla is at pains to stress the otherness of the rampaging menace from beyond prehistory. Like the mysterious aliens of Edwards' low budget hit Monsters, these MUTOs are an exotic mating pair, with the immensity of their physical presence on screen supported by weird/unearthly noises. Most visually stunning of all, though, is the breathtakingly surreal tableaux of a HALO jump, with US paratroopers' red smoke trails glowing eerily like dying coals in the invaded urban twilight. That striking

sequence aside, it's difficult for the characters to bring humanscale impact to this struggle for planetary dominance by 'alpha predator' Godzilla, Planes, trains, warships - hardware is tossed around effortlessly by titans. Just playing their stock-rolesfrom-disaster-movies, Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Elizabeth Olsen are weak, but can hardly be faulted in a narrative that frames their separation as a metaphor for divisive but 'interesting' times. As the chief scientists on different sides of an east-west political landscape, veterans Ken Watanabe and Bryan Cranston fare better, while Juliette Binoche is simply reduced to an extendedcameo of sacrificial tragedy. David Strathairn (from TV series Alphas) is good value as the US navy admiral, stoically facing unthinkable/unwinnable odds.

Ultimately a superhero movie of Lovecraftian proportions, telling an updated origin story with creature-villains for our gigantic planet-protector to save the world from, *Godzilla* is a welcome revision of/addition to kaiju movie legends, one that balances (albeit imperfectly) its inherited foreign milieu and traditional concerns with Hollywood blockbuster influences. The Blu-ray disc's extras include three more featurettes than the DVD edition.



Based on a first novel by Swedish author Jonas Jonasson, THE HUNDRED-YEAR-OLD MAN WHO CLIMBED OUT OF THE WINDOW AND DISAPPEARED

(Blu-ray/DVD, 27 October) has a fractured plotline that meanders through cheerful revisions of modern history, borrowing themes of satirical witticism from Zelig (1983) and Forrest Gump (1994). With its agreeable blending of surrealist biopic style and black comedy, it tells the colourful life story of centenarian hero Allan Karlsson (Robert Gustafsson, usually under layers of special make-up). Orphaned from Russian peasants, institutionalised for juvenile delinquency, Allan flits to Spain, where his fascination for dynamite helps the International Brigade blow up bridges. After saving General Franco from a timely explosion, Allan takes his idiot daring to America, where he solves technical problems of the Manhattan Project and gets all chummy with Truman. In a Kremlin farce, Allan gets drunk with Stalin, but his blathering

about being a hero to fascists results in exile to a gulag, from where he eventually escapes – along with Einstein's brainless brother Herbert. Recruited by the CIA in 1960s Paris, Allan becomes a veteran double-agent who later bumps into Reagan and then Gorbachev, single-handedly prompting the Berlin Wall to fall. And so on...

In the present, restless Allan runs away from the retirement home to avoid his hundredth birthday party. He gets his Munchausenian trek on with further adventure that attracts unwelcome attention when Allan and his casually-assembled cohorts are pursued across Nordic country by violent bikers and a baffled police inspector. Allan's inadvertently stolen a suitcase of cash belonging to a British gangster (old geezer Alan Ford, phoning in from his Indonesian hideaway), and unsavoury stereotypes are after the loot. Shotgunned flashbacks with spy-fi genre riffs and karma-lite pay-offs ensure there's never a dull imaginary moment in this parodic exercising of breezily fortuitous twists.

"If you want to kill me, you'd better hurry..." Imagine a version of the old spies' road movie RED directed by the Coen brothers. The actual director is Felix Herngren, who deserves his popular acclaim for bringing neo-noir humour to cinema audiences, and this international hit is reportedly the highest-grossing Swedish movie to date. In the end, Allan and his pals decamp to Bali (of course!) in a Hercules cargo plane with an adopted elephant, where he manages to complete the unfinished business of many others, and without losing any of the admirably foolish trademark optimism about his own uncertain future. Whether offhandedly disposing of corpses, or blundering in (or out) of mortal danger, Allan simply lacks the foresight for anxiety or the hindsight for melancholy, but enjoys the luxury of reflection, so his one-liner wisdom is irrefutable. Enjoy this instant classic while it lasts!



Best appreciated as *Event Horizon* meets *Tron*, **DEBUG** (DVD/Bluray, 3 November) is the first sci-fi movie written and directed by popular genre star David Hewlett. For his previous effort, TV-movie *Rage of the Yeti* (2011), he also

appeared on screen but here stays behind the camera, earning some cult cred by milking his B-movie scenario for all it's worth. In a space-opera future that clearly isn't utopian, six criminal techies are press-ganged for a shuttle mission to a gigantic freighter, now uninhabited except for vermin. Infected bio-ware systems means the starship is 'haunted' by a homicidal A.I. named 'Iam' (Jason Mamoa, a former co-star

of Hewlett's on Stargate: Atlantis). Hewlett's claims that Debug is Kubrick's 2001 told from HAL's perspective make this sound quite pretentious, but it's not. A far stronger influence on Hewlett's directorial style is Vincenzo Natali, who directed Hewlett on Cube, Cypher, Nothing, Splice and Haunter. Despite casting the hairy Momoa against computer-persona stereotype, the best of Debug's cast is Ripleyesque heroine Kaida,



As the gloomy prospects for climate change become an unavoidably terminal reality, legendary British disaster movie THE DAY THE EARTH CAUGHT FIRE (DVD/Blu-ray, 17 November) seems more eerie, frightening and unnervingly prophetic than it ever might have been on its first release in 1961. A masterpiece of understated apocalypse, it captures a simply chilling melancholy that most typical Hollywood blockbusters are unable to match. A gripping SF thriller, produced after a successful Ouatermass, this is set in the Daily Express newspaper offices - where an ironic tale of mankind's folly unfolds in flashback - as a reporter stumbles through the litter/rubble-strewn streets of London, waiting for the outcome of a final desperate attempt to avert catastrophe.

The movie gave a big break to TV actor Edward Judd, and the first adult role for Disney player Janet Munro. However, the brains of this affair is undoubtedly Leo McKern, who plays the newsroom's brusque know-it-all with a deft, pointed wisdom that adds impact to already realistic features, like sets copied from genuine locations on Fleet Street. By choice, there is no background score at all in this picture, fixing in place the documentary style adopted by director Val Guest, and this sense of realism is highly effective in generating tension in busy London streets, and moody anxieties between the core characters. A judicious mix of newsreel footage of natural disasters, cut together seamlessly with visual effects shots (by veteran Les Bowie) ensure it hits the right emotional notes of

alarm, bewilderment and despair precisely on cue. And, of course, these emotions are shared by the bright intelligence of the fine cast. Judd's alcoholic newshound makes for a sympathetic movie hero, going through a believable character-arc while courting Munro.

The main plot concerns illtimed American and Soviet nuclear tests, which tilt the planet off its axis and send it spiralling in towards the Sun. Is there any chance of survival from using more atomic bombs against orbital decay? A sweltering heatwave brings drought, blinding fog, and the Thames runs dry. There are convincing details - like retrofitted cars adapted to conserve water, and an unexpected eclipse warning all that something is wrong with the Earth's orbit. Reactions range from the traditions of WW2 Blitz solidarity to anti-nuclear protests (CND march on Downing Street!), but violence and rioting is inevitable when all public order breaks down under pressure of the impending cataclysm.

Making few concessions to genre conventions, and with authentic news media-patois worked into the script, *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* deserves reassessment as one of the greatest contributions to British SF cinema.

played by Jeananne Goossen (from *Alcatraz*, *Riverworld*), acting like she's the new Kari Wuhrer.

Although it tries hard to be creepy, with slickly presented but sadly hokey low-cost riffs on techno-thriller chillers and slasher game-play, there's not very much here that makes sense as SF, and it shies away from extreme violence or explicit gore, even though Hewlett cranks up the tension for each death scene.

Where it wins through all of its narrative elisions and budget-conscious shortcuts is with its stylish design work. Virtual HUD showcases nifty graphics, including split-screen comms; the surveillance camera angles generate a required atmosphere of paranoia and, despite the antiseptic gleam of the main sets (a contrast to the industrial grunge of Swiss movie Cargo), the sterile whiteness is just as uncanny

as horror's gothic mansion of typically cobwebbed halls, and the movie's final masquerade of murder in cyberspace forms an alternative visual formula to any Poe-inspired climax of ghostly vengeance. Hewlett blends genre elements well enough and delivers a handful of crowd-pleasing moments, so *Debug* is well worth seeing, whether you liked the aforementioned pitch-combo *Event Horizon* and *Tron* or not.

With TV anthology drama shows such as Armchair Theatre and The Wednesday Play a proven success, and genre variations like Twilight Zone (1959–64) and Outer Limits (1963–5) winning respect from SF fandom, the BBC continued the trend from 1965–71 with **OUT**

the trend from 1965-71 with OUT OF THE UNKNOWN (DVD, 24 November). Created by Irene Shubik, this series adapted stories by top genre writers - Asimov, Bradbury, Pohl, Wyndham, etc and exhibited levels of intelligence that quickly established higher standards of speculative ideals than generally more folksy American TV counterparts. The British production boasts plenty of excellent writing, often ambitious in themes addressed in wordy dialogues, but occasionally cursed by some overly-theatrical acting that makes the serious nature of its adult programming (for then new BBC2) unfortunately prone to melodrama. In spite of a preoccupation with numerous late-1960s counter-cultural issues, it remains a show of intellectual sophistication, with a rich diversity of themes. More than half of it is lost but the series is represented here by twenty surviving episodes.

Based on John Wyndham's story, No Place Like Earth harks back to Barsoom but folds Bradbury's Silver Locusts (aka



SHICKERRENATE

Martian Chronicles) into its futuristic myth. Stranded on Mars after the destruction of Earth. repairman Bert helps aliens - on this planet of canals - but Martian civilisation is failing, too. There is some hilariously bad science (about colonised Venus, etc), but the pulpy narrative pushes ahead regardless as a totalitarian regime greets our hero, and he's ordered to work for a Major Khan as overseer to control enslaved indigenous drone humanoids. Griffas' dissenting attitude soon turns into rebellion in a politically naive but nonetheless expected conclusion.

The Counterfeit Man stars David Hemmings, a body-snatching 'alien' presence on a spaceship returning from Ganymede. Wescott looks normal but the ship's doctor and captain suspect he's a disguised spy. A typical drama of paranoia, like a Cold War psych test, this sees the victim of xenophobia framed as a thief and Wescott is primed with extraordinary malice for a mental breakdown ("Go ahead, go out of your mind") that leads to a physical meltdown, but the finale has another twist to offer.

Stranger in the Family is an oddity in a contemporary setting where a mutant son of normal parents demonstrates psi powers of mind control. When his family are stalked by agents living right next door in a London block of flats, Boy (yes, that's his name)



THE MALE HAR STREET

pursues mystery blonde Paula. She takes him home, he stops her from talking. As he tends to leave nothing short of consternation in his wake, the young stranger is declared a public menace, and so the authorities get heavy.

The Dead Past has curiosity damned by government policy when scientists are forbidden to perform research using timeviewer tech. Featuring Asimovian criticism of modern academic education systems that stifle progress, the plot centres on either a conspiracy to suppress knowledge or a revelation of a benevolent dictatorship (with "all the symptoms of maturity") actually protecting everybody's right to privacy. This, like other thematically-complex OOTU episodes, is more stingingly significant today.

Directed by Peter Sasdy, Time in Advance presents blond wigs and shiny sets as parts of a dark utopia where crime's controlled by pre-criminal justice and violence is dealt with by a half-sentence imprisonment off-world in exchange for any voluntary confession of intent. Returning to Earth after seven years of hard labour, two ex-cons are granted licences to kill. A psychological chiller of betrayals and vengeance

starring Edward Judd (*The Day the Earth Caught Fire*) and Mike Pratt (*Randall & Hopkirk*), the storyline – originally by William Tenn – weaves a causal web of practical insanity.

Sucker Bait features Burt Kwouk as a crewman on a mysterious space mission, where the 'human instrument' of a mnemonic agent claims ideas above even his boygenius station. On a distant world where two suns cast differently coloured shadows, the bogus threat of 'chromopsychosis' is used to gain exalted professional advantage. One of the cleverest dramas in the series, this explores fragility of trust under political agendas.

"What is the burning disc?" Thirteen to Centaurus is based on a tale by J.G. Ballard, and it concerns the bubble community of a secret ark-ship project. Inside the mock ship - which religion promotes as a definite, all-there-is reality - racial memory and deductive reasoning, about life under a dome, breaks the socialengineering spell with Westworld and Truman Show consequences when a 'lab rat' takes control of the grand experiment...and then space command will be sorry. Another sort of rebellion, Pohl's The Midas Plague is broad



THE CHAPTER ARATE MAN

comedy about slapstick robots in consumer society. The ultimate decadence is slacker's paradise but a dystopia for a working-class hero's angst: "I haven't got time for love, I'm too busy consuming."

Production values increased markedly for 1966's season two. beginning with an "Edwardian view of the future" in The Machine Stops adapted from the novel by E.M. Forster. Life in sterile isolation is not living, thinks the box-room rebel Kuno (Michael Gothard - remember him as 'Kai' from Arthur of the Britons or an 'alien' in Warlords of Atlantis?). When Kuno's application to become a father is rejected, he wants to get out and is determined to visit the surface of Earth, despite the shuddersome nature of direct experience: "All unrest is concentrated in the soul." whatever/wherever that is. The only way to escape into the green hills of Wessex is through an evocatively named 'vomitory'. This is another sci-fi fable that is painfully relevant to the fragility of social lives in our Internet age.

Lambda I suggests 'Tau' transport (via atomic space) is a routine way to travel, until the slow teleportation of Elektron results in the ship being stuck out-of-phase, in omega mode,



en route from London to New York. The unconvincing miniature effects spoil this amusing technothriller about a whimsical rescue mission where the human psyche can distort physics into bizarre metamorphic visions. And they once imagined that Concorde was risky! Scripted by J.B. Priestley, Level Seven concerns a bunker for nameless Cold War troops. Michele Dotrice and David Collings play volunteers for an impersonal duty (of last resort) in an underworld where freedom and democracy have been banned. even as words. Pohl's Tunnel Under the World is a Twilight Zone style mystery of recurring dreams, intrusive salesmanship of white goods - for which jingly adverts become absurdly malignant - and cyber-tech heralding a VR nightmare. "Why don't you be reasonable and let the maintenance crew adjust you?"

Season three was the first videoed in colour, beginning with Robert Sheckley's *Immortality Inc* (filmed by Geoff Murphy as *Freejack*, 1992), but it's one of the tapes 'recycled' by the BBC. From the John Brunner story, *The Last Lonely Man* becomes a classic of this TV series. George Cole is a victim of Contact, a kind of ultimate care-in-the-community

scheme, when his headspace is occupied by a suicidal neurotic. There are paranoid-schizophrenic episodes as the product of mindtransference, courtesy of nannystate social-engineering, in this psych-horror exploring the price of compassion in a brave new world of telepathic immortality. It is the kind of SF concept and what-if extrapolation of a technological impact on society that was examined much later in Joss Whedon's Dollhouse, A later OOTU episode, This Body is Mine sees Jack Hedley fall prey to a mind-swap scam. A comedyof-errors that ends in tragedy, it's much less interesting than The Last Lonely Man.

There are reconstructed (photos/audio with CGI) and incomplete episodes in this boxset, including teleplay adaptations of tales by Simak and Kornbluth. However, after the departure of pioneering editor Shubik, the final season of OOTU dropped its sci-fi content, switching to vaguely supernatural stories usually with contemporary settings, of which the punningly-titled psychicthriller To Lay a Ghost (Lesley-Anne Down plays a newlywed haunted by a rapist) is a fairly characteristic example.

A retro documentary, Return of



the Unknown (42 minutes), charts the show's legacy and gathers fragments of what's been lost and extracts from what's survived, to enable participants' reminiscence. The restoration work on this boxset is occasionally "pragmatic rather than comprehensive" by necessity and dependence upon a budget, but it's good to see that any such effort has been made for this BFI release of archived material. Accompanying the DVD boxset is an illustrated booklet of informative essays by Mark Ward and an episode guide. If only we had a time machine... Forget about killing Hitler, go back and stop the BBC from 'saving money' by wiping videos!

LATE ARRIVAL



CONGRESS
(DVD/Blu-ray,
8 December).
Ari Folman's
animation/live
action sf satire
with Robin

Wright playing a version of herself in a dark dystopian future where life is more imagined than lived. (See Nick Lowe in *Interzone* #254.)

MUTANT POPCORN NICK LOWE

PREDESTINATION

RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH

TORIGINS

LIFE AFTER BETH

THE BOOK OF LIFE

IF I STAY

THE GIVER

THE MAZE RUNNER

TENNAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

DRACULA UNTOLD

THEBOATROLLS

THE BABADOOK

EXTRATERRESTRIAL

THESIGNAL

here are moments in science fiction where history is truly made, and one of them takes place at 10.17 p.m. in a bar in New York City in 1970, where a troubled transsexual pours out his story to an undercover temporal agent with a still more convoluted secret of his own: he knows where he comes from, but where did all you zombies come from? Now in Australian adventure **PREDESTINATION** the Spierig brothers, whose previous film with

brothers, whose previous film with Ethan Hawke was the vampire sf thriller Daybreakers, have adapted Bob Heinlein's most famous story in the most daring way possible, which is to do it absolutely straight. A generous chunk of original dialogue survives, right through to the final line, while everything that is dated, silly, or unworkable in the source has been pummelled in regardless: the confession magazines and the Unmarried Mother; the long two-handed bar-room expothon that is the first half of the story; even the truly bizarre (and, for the plot, irrelevant) joy division of sixties NASA comfort workers. who were surely injected into the story as a piece of strategically gratuitous titillation because 'All You Zombies' was originally dashed off in a day as an attempted sale to Playboy, and still stands as a weird time capsule of 1960 sexual attitudes as further weirdened by filtration through the sensibilities of Troopers-era Heinlein. It even finds room for the jukebox soundtrack, whose title would give the game away if anyone else alive remembered it.

The Spierigs have had their work cut out trying to make this stuff play in 2014, and have sensibly realised that the only reasonable recourse is to run it as a period piece in its original setting – though 1970 was still a good deal more than a decade away from anything Heinlein was

capable of imagining in 1960, and the film has to leave us to suppose that all the time-terrorism Hawke and his corps spend their lives trying to undo has left their reality pretty radically altered from our own. And yet against all reason, and to the Spierigs' enormous if probably thankless credit, an implausible amount of this succeeds - turning Jane's strange journey between lives and loops in time into a surprisingly affecting arc of heartbreak and yearning across knots of time in which the very self is scrambled but the persistence of loss aches on. That's not, of course, what the story is remembered for, and some judicious facial reconstruction and a suspicious number of obfuscated faces contrive to keep the mystery dangling, though one suspects that viewers who don't know what is being played out will be less satisfied than those who do. Since the story never actually shows us the hero's day job in temporal counterterrorism, the brothers have spiced the action up by expanding the throwaway reference to the "Fizzle War of 1963" into a running plot within the story, the action sequences paid off with an additional further twist on Jane's story - though as there are only three characters in the film, the riddle of the villain's identity would seem to have a fairly limited candidate shortlist. But watching the film is a moving journey into the history of sf, an evocation of what it feels like to jump back in your own timeline to when the classics were fresh and innocent in a world so very long gone. I miss them dreadfully.

similarly disarming affection for its period source is the principal virtue of **RADIO FREE ALBEMUTH**, which looks set to scoop *A Scanner Darkly*'s palm as the most faithful and least profitable Philip K. Dick



adaptation. Journalist turned producer John Alan Simon, a longstanding PKD evangelist who for years has been hustling a precarious living on the margins of the big time, caught a break a decade back when Tom Cruise signed him to adapt Flow my Tears, the Policeman Said for Oliver Stone to direct, and after the project fell through he cannily invested his fee in the outright purchase of the film rights in a deal which saw Valis and Radio Free Albemuth thrown in. (That was then; these days the price tag on any Dick work, be it The Man in the High Castle or 'Beyond Lies the Wub', is a serious-applicants-only \$1.2 million.) While studios fight over the big-ticket Flow my Tears, Simon has turned hyphenate to write and direct his own low-budget indie adaptation of Albemuth, which has been in the works so long it was starting to smell like vaporware, or at least like a whiffy rightsretention quickie in the tradition of Corman's Fantastic Four. Shot in three weeks in 2007, it was screened at festivals in 2010 as a work-in-progress, before finally coming out in the US this summer as a limited. Kickstarter-funded

promotional release to cinemas in support of a streaming and DVD debut. The epicly protracted post-production has never been altogether explained, though possibly because there's nothing to explain beyond a complete lack of money for even the modest digital and animated effects sequences required.

Radio Free Albemuth is the Dick novel which mainly finds the readers who need to read it: the lost original Valis novel from 1976 that was knocked back by Bantam, gifted in manuscript to Tim Powers, and lay unknown and unpublished till 1985, though its plot became the film-withina-novel in Valis. Like Valis, it's an autobiographical fantasy splitting Dick and his response to the 2-3-74 experiences into two characters: here Phil himself and his best friend Nick Brady, who is visited by a series of visions which he comes to believe are beamed down by an orbital satellite known as Valis and originating from the distant star Albemuth, which is instructing him on the overthrow of the Nixonian tyrant President Freemont. Simon's version ages down the characters and moves

"Radio Free Albemuth looks set to scoon A becomer Darkly's policias the most failated over least protectable Philip R. Dick adaptation"

the action up to a dystopian alternate 1985 (with a striking Robyn Hitchcock soundtrack), but generally follows the novel's plot closely, including the badly-dated business with the subliminal message encoded in a pop song, but with the Scanner Darkly ending largely intact. The intentions are noble and the cast able enough - improbably including Alanis Morrisette as a mysteriously implicated songbird - but Simon's combination of directorial inexperience with a reverent enthusiasm for the material has a tendency to bump up the weaknesses and flatten out the strengths, often falling into laboriously-staged twohanded conspiracy dialogues which play like the stoned riffings of scramble-brained couch surfers. It's easy to see why Dick lost interest in this version as something vastly stranger and more wonderful flowered from its seed.



cience and religion form a different symbiosis in I ORIGINS (above), whose writer-director Mike Cahill is something of an aspirant to the mantle of next Shane Carruth. having now traversed a similar path with his indie calling card Another Earth, only for his ambitious follow-up project to fall through and send him back to Sundance instead for this second feature, a prequel to his unmade eschatological sf epic I. Like Another Earth, it's a disconcerting mix of the glorious and the maddening, beautifully mounted and sincerely in love with science and its wonders, but hauled earthward by flim-flam and howlers, a weakness for flaky new-age thinking, and a faintly patronising desire for scientists to think more like filmmakers. Our hero is a geneticist working on the evolution of vision who wants to stick it to the intelligentdesigners and their (long-refuted) arguments about the eye as a challenge to Darwinism, when he meets a gorgeous masked model in a hump-cute at a party (something that totally happens to lab geeks all the time) and tracks her down

from her eyes on a billboard, only for tragedy to strike on the eve of their wedding and launch a new phase of the story eight years on where the opthalmographic database turns out to be the clue to a world-changing discovery whose key lies on the other side of the globe. Most viewers miss the big payoff, which comes in a scene right at the end of the credits that you'll want to pause through when it comes around on domestic.

Notwithstanding the frankly pop-video plotting of its first act, it's a film that makes you watch in new ways, attending to the characters' eyes as organs of aesthetic beauty and specific individuated significance. (One side effect is the penny-drop insight that the reason Brit Marling has that trademark through-you stare is that she's just extremely short-sighted.) Like his hero, Cahill loves light and what it does to the sense organs, while his presentation of the working lives of research geneticists is full of affectionate touches of authenticity and observation, to the point where you can almost look past the manifold absurdities of the plot and the cringeable debates

about science and religion. "On the evening of a discovery when you're lying in bed," says Marling on the cusp of a breakthrough, "you're the only one in the world who knows it's true." It's a shame she isn't as eloquent on the nature of scientific truth, the elimination of experimenter bias, shared credit on joint discoveries, and indeed what Indian community workers are likely to think of strange Americans coming looking for little girls in the Mumbai slums to take back to their hotel to conduct "experiments".

less bullish vision of love beyond death is offered by Jeff Baena's LIFE AFTER BETH, an old script that itself came back from the grave when his girlfriend Aubrey Plaza pitched it to producers. A snakebitten Plaza turns up undead to the initial mystified delight of boyfriend Dane DeHaan and her parents, but with increasingly dismaying consequences as it becomes apparent that the revenants are affected by something more serious than a touch of brain damage. The inspired central gag



is that the zombie apocalypse has already happened but nobody has so much as noticed, least of all in middle-class Jewish suburbia. DeHaan plays it absolutely straight while an increasingly demented and hilarious Plaza quite literally masticates the upholstery as her undeadness asserts itself in a love of smooth jazz, attic spaces, and hiking with cookers; a cracking support cast of famous govim eat up the opportunity to play Jewish, with John C. Reilly and a fleeting Anna Kendrick on particularly choice form; and the offstage apocalypse thoughtfully declines to trouble us with the niceties of explanation or expensive set pieces. It's only fair to warn that the humour is likely to split viewers, and that some will sit through it in stony unamusement - but if it's for you, it will be.

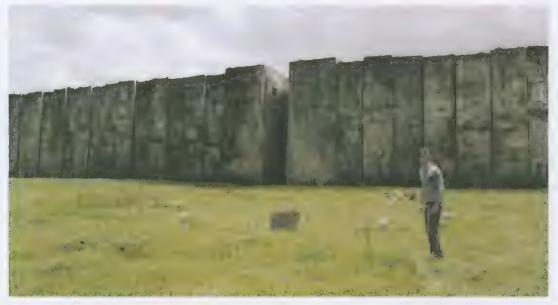
he Orphic allusions, snakebite and all, are even more insistent in Day of the Dead fantasy **THE BOOK OF LIFE**, from Dallas-based Tex-Mex studio Reel FX with Guillermo del Toro producing: a proudly mad and garish declaration of Mexican independence from Hollywood

narrative aesthetics, channelled through the improbable medium of 3D family animation. A wager between Death and Xibalba on the outcome of a love triangle sees bullfighting minstrel Manolo prematurely demoted to the Land of the Remembered while his childhood bestie Joaquin moves in on his luscious squeeze Maria, recently returned from her European convent education with a sophisticated new appreciation of art, music, and kick-arse kung fu. To return, save his village, and win back the girl Manolo has to embark on a perilous catabasis-within-a-catabasis to the Land of the Forgotten and there negotiate a rather forced plot sophistry which will unlock a cool third-act battle in which everyone stunt-kicks bandit culo in time for a romantic finish by sundown. Gobsmacking visuals and a healthy feminist contempt for Hollywood-style male posturing and competition enliven a formulaic game-style narrative; this is the first film where the hero's dead mother, whom the film initially pretends to have consigned to Hollywood's land of the conveniently obliviated,

The Book of Life: a proudly mad and garish declaration of Mexicus independence from Hellywood narrative aeothetics

becomes his action sidekick. In a mercifully doomed attempt to tame and sanitise the wild non-denominational pagan excesses of what aspires to be nothing less than a Mexican Spirited Away, the story has been forcibly boxed up in a desperately ill-conceived narrative frame about a group of "detention kids" on a museum trip, staged in a boilerplate American visual style that only serves to offset the stunning digital wooden puppets of the principal narrative.

ompleting a triptych of Eurydicean resurrections is YA adaptation IF I STAY, in which teen cellist Chloe Moretz's retired-rocker parents decide it would be a really sensible idea to celebrate a snow day with a family drive, thereby consigning the heroine to spend the rest of the film as a disembodied spirit moping over her comatose body in ER as she reflects on her breakup with her rocker boyfriend and the



"The Maze Ruoner has minaged to break launsgate's stranslehold on franchise adaptations that actuary turn a profit"

outcome of her Juilliard audition, and deliberates on whether the film into which she'd awaken is sufficiently worth sitting through or whether on balance she'd rather stay dead. The screenplay has done what it can to breathe some cinematic incident into a perfectly effective but completely static character piece, in which nothing whatever happens and the central character has no interaction with or power over a single thing in the story. So the film version spins out the fates of the other crash victims, complicates the boyfriend thing with a breakup, and punches up the dramatic beats as far as constraints allow. Normally the casting of Moretz in a dramatic role is a big flashing red light to assume the brace position, but she's working more within her range here than in most of her flashier roles, and is quite persuasive in her flashbacked scenes of musical transportation, even with her face digitally

bobbleheaded on to a real cellist's body, though she's rather less so doing the mopeyface voiceover thing around casualty while Owl Creek Bridge is closed for repairs. Still, there were huge blubbing noises behind me, so someone clearly thinks it delivers.

imilar adaptational challenges dog THE GIVER, which Jeff Bridges has been trying to get made for most of the twenty years since Lois Lowry's novel fired the starting gun on the YA dystopian boom, and now stumbles in late to the party after its children have already drained most of the punch. Unlike most Hollywood source novels, YA books are sacred texts to their fiercely protective readers, and this one still more than most; and Philip Noyce's film had the torches and pitchforks out early when it emerged he was going to use colour in a story that was all about seeing in black and white. That part turns out to be fairly harmless, as Brenton Thwaites' agecoming teen is assigned by his adult controllers to the job of generational custodian of pre-apocalyptic memories, and learns that their apparent

utopian community is founded on lies, drugs, atrocities, and collective amnesia, prompting him to skip his medication and learn to see in colour as he discovers his revolutionary calling. As has become obligatory in such adaptations, the hero has been aged up past puberty and positioned in a love triangle, albeit one of those faintly queasy ones where a child actress is romanced by a 24-year-old impostor. The film has had particular problems with Lowry's ending, where the hero escapes into an ambiguous fate while the effects of his actions are left behind in a different story. Though he does turn out in the later novels to have survived, the film still needs a properly cinematic climax, and so has unwisely tried to tighten the novel's vague explanation of how young Jonas' breach of the boundary will somehow liberate the community's walled-up memories, though at least it doesn't try to bring back Taylor Swift's character. There are three more books in the series, but this is surely the last we'll see of them on film, and those lines of the US political spectrum that have



welcomed the film as a prophetic warning that Obaman state paternalism will lead inexorably to mass infanticide, the loss of chromatic vision, and Meryl Streep in a terrible wig are likely to be disappointed.

till in aged-up YA, vfx man
Wes Ball's modestly budgeted
directing debut **THE**MAZE RUNNER has managed

MAZE RUNNER has managed to break Lionsgate's stranglehold on franchise adaptations that actually turn a profit, with James Dashner's series-starter pitting Dylan O'Brien and his colourful supporting cast of amnesiac boys (plus one Kaya Scodelario) against the system in a videogame environment patrolled by giant robot spider versions of Starship Troopers bugs and bullied over by Will Poulton's psycho fly-lord, all under the watchful supervision of sinister Patricia Clarkson and her fellow experimenter-gods. Like Divergent, it's a series that takes a different turn in subsequent volumes and will need some careful transition management to retain its audience, and the film version tellingly drops the last couple of chapters to leave the

trajectory of the action more open. But the setup in this instalment is solid, rejigging the action to make the maze less of a spatial puzzle than a series of game levels and challenges, and making the most of its allegory of male adolescence as an adult-controlled gamespace from which you have to break out on your own. It goes a bit Serenity at the end, and the explanation of what's really going on pays the price for disencumbering its world and cast of any history. But the casting has managed to round up an impressive fraternity of those young male actors not yet committed elsewhere, and it would be good if the one who turns out not dead in the books were to join his mates in the sequels.

legendary teen-hero franchise rises anew in **TEENAGE MUȚANT NINJA TURTLES**, in which Jonathan Liebesman gives the half-shelled heroes a 3D Michael Bay makeover with Megan Fox dangling off things and trucks tumbling down improbably extended snowslopes abutting the NY city limits. The Turtles' origin story has been discreetly

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
"ups the spectocle while still
working harner than earlier
films have at picing them
distinguishable characters"

revised (again) to connect them more directly with April O'Neil, whose character is lightly rebuilt to restore some of her original science background, and the film seeks to ingratiate itself with a light lubrication of self-reflexivity: "It's OK to give people a little lighter, a little froth. It's nice, it tastes good. It's candy." And: "I have known them since I was a little girl. They were my childhood pets." When April introduces them as ninja mutant turtle teenagers, "When you put it like that it sounds ridiculous." But all this is truer than earlier films have been to the Eastman-Laird comics' satirical impulse, and as a Turtles film it ups the spectacle while still working harder than earlier films have at giving them distinguishable characters. The plot starts out promisingly, with the NYPD getting into bed with William Fichtner's philanthropic contractor whose one sinister tell is that he looks like William



The Boxtrolis: "a newer-dwelling underclass who clothe and hine themselves in heritage packing materials, the toys of the poor since time retro"

Fichtner, though any sense of social agenda is soon swept up in moderate action violence and threat. You can't help noticing that the ident for Bay's production company Platinum Dunes, which has also given us the *Purge* films, looks like a giant pile of cocaine.

RACULA UNTOLD is the first plank of Universal's ambitious plan to rebuild their classic monster franchises as a rebooted and remythologised shared universe for the post-Marvel franchise age, with Dracula, Frankenstein, the Mummy and Wolfman lined up for a slate of solo origin vehicles which can then go crossover down the line. It's a handsome production, made in Northern Ireland with a crew drawn heavily from Game of Thrones, with costumes by LotR's Ngila Dickson and the legendary Weta armourers; and though a wobbly US bow threw an initial question

mark over the franchise ambitions, global takings have been good and the prospects look healthy for both sequel and extended universe.

As you'd hope but not necessarily expect from the original proprietors of Dracula's franchise presence on film, Untold is a thoughtful and impressively nerdy dive into the deep backstory of Stoker's character and the threads of earlier legend from which he was knitted, grafting the vampire myth in its Hollywood form back on to the historical figure of Vlad Tepes, whose career has here been revised as a supernatural origin story incorporating a fair number of unexpectedly authentic dates, figures, and events (including the specific fate of Mrs Vlad). The Luke Evans incarnation starts out as a reformed family man and beloved king ("My fellow Transylvanians," he addresses his subjects) who's trying to put his youthful impaling days behind him, when the Turks he once served come oppressing and he has to raise his game by accepting a three-day free trial of Charles Dance's vampire superpowers that he can return and pay

nothing if he only can stave off the haemoglobin munchies. So what terrible thing will Dominic Cooper and his world-conquering imperial-grade eyeliner have to do to tempt him to take up the mantle of the original Bat-Man permanently? And as Byzantium crumbles and only Transylvania stands between the Turk and the capitals of Europe, will he ever get to use those impaling skills on screen? "Sometimes the world does not need a hero; sometimes what the world needs is a monster." We'll put that down as a yes.

onsters become heroes in Portland stop-mo madhouse Laika's latest family offering THE BOXTROLLS, a very free reimagining of the great children's illustrator Alan Snow's abortive venture into fiction with 2007's engagingly wonky Here Be Monsters!, which was originally intended as the first volume of a thus far uncontinued series The Ratbridge Chronicles. Snow's book is less a novel in the conventional sense than a bursting portfolio of wild ideas and signature spidery line art standing on one



another's shoulders under a novelistic overcoat and hat; and the film version is not so much an adaptation as an extended tribute which has mostly built its own world and story on top of a fairly arbitrary selection of elements and designs from the book. So gone are Snow's walking cheeses, talking rats, and most of the characters and plot; but still with us and promoted to centre stage are the Boxtrolls themselves, a sewer-dwelling underclass who clothe and hide themselves in heritage packing materials, the toys of the poor since time retro, and who now find themselves targeted for extermination as part of evil Sir Ben Kingsley's scheme to force his way into the elite.

Like its predecessors Coraline and Paranorman, it's an extremely dark and strange story, quite stunningly animated, that mimics enough of the walk and gait to pass for a family film, but engages with such adult and frankly terrifying themes that it ought to have a special certificate requiring anyone over ten to be accompanied by a child lest they be entirely traumatised. The town now rebranded "Cheesebridge"

is a vertiginous 3D hierarchy of brutal class warfare whose impermeable ruling elite sequesters itself in a rarefied world of epicurean aesthetics while death squads roam the streets outside any effective control, and the oppressed population are propagandised as terrorists in tunnels while actually being exploited as a source of slave labour to build the instruments of their own genocide, and the hate preacher who puts out the message is none other than the exterminator-in-chief in disguise. Orphan hero Eggs narrowly escapes his father's execution by paramilitaries: "They drag us away and we do nothing. Why do we do this, carry on as normal?" The restoration of the natural hierarchy at the end, and the reassurance that the mass executions aren't as fatal as they looked, offer only wisps of consolation. But do stay numbly in your seat for Richard Ayoade's wonderful Paranormanstyle end-credits reveal.

nother children's book comes to terrifying life in Jennifer Kent's remarkable Australian horror **THE BABADOOK**

(above), which brings a strikingly European directorial lexicon (Kent studied under Lars von Trier, and works here with the Polish cinematographer Radek Ladczuk) to the familiar jolts and creeps of horror cinema, in a splendidly colour-drained Adelaide suburbia of grotesquely chic young mums and sweetly sinister old biddies. Essie Davis is the struggling widowed mother of a precocious disturbed six-yearold (an astonishing debut from Noah Wiseman) who can neither of them let go of the tragedy between them ("My dad's in the cemetery. He got killed driving mum to the hospital to have me"), when a wildly inappropriate and terrifying pop-up book (superbly designed by Californian illustrator Alex Juhasz) mysteriously inserts itself into their lives and tips their fragile grip on sanity over the edge, interpolating itself into montages of Méliès shorts on late-night telly and turning their home into the mother-and-child wing of the Overlook Hotel, It's perhaps fussy to feel that the two killer ideas - the haunted pop-up book and the malevolent deaddad shadow - don't entirely gel as



parts of the same film, or that the ending (one of the survivals from Kent's 2005 short *Monster*) has some jagged edges that could have used another script pass.

n more conventional horror space is EXTRATERRES-TRIAL, which is not to be confused with Nacho Timecrimes Vigalondo's simultaneously debuting UFO-apocalypse romcom, and seems from the project credits to have been originally intended to be titled Abduction before its title was stolen by the forgettable Taylor Lautner thriller you'd until now successfully forgotten. This one is a post-ironic alien-abduction horror about a quintet of attractive young people who head out to what they quite unselfconsciously refer to as "The Cabin in the Woods". where they encounter a table d'hôte of alien-encounter tropes with a film-stealing side serving of Michael Ironside as a batshit survivalist conspiracy warrior, and unravel a web of cover-up and collusion that has every interest in seeing the asses probed out of them. It's hard to go badly wrong with an abduction chiller, though

Extraterrestrial regresses more to default horror jolts than its genre cousins The Fourth Kind and Dark Skies, and the ending is one of those cynically nasty twists you've seen far too many times in other films to feel rewarded by another one here.

wildly more audacious treatment of the abduction myth is William Eubank's sophomore feature THE SIGNAL (above), in which three students pursue a mystery hacker who has got into MIT's network, tracking him down to a spooky house in the middle of nowhere - only to be promptly abducted by aliens, and wake up in a sinister retro-styled facility where Larry Fishburne and his team of sinister debriefers in hazmat suits are holding them in isolation with the ostensible aim of finding out about something very scary that ET has done to our heroes (as indeed, we soon find out, they have). But geek genius Brenton Thwaites is having none of this, and contrives an escape plan that turns out to take him through a series of shock discoveries, as the film modulates from Blair Witch

to abduction movie to Twelve Monkeys to apocalyptic chase film to a kind of superhero version of Dark City. Writer-director Eubank pulled off a similar set of genre and conceptual gearchanges in his extraordinary 2011 debut Love, a 2001 homage which moved from the discovery of a mysterious artefact in Civil War Arizona to a lone astronaut marooned on the Space Station by a global apocalypse, and thence to a Contact-inspired transcendental payoff. But The Signal is a more assured and populist serving of the same obsessions, burning through ideas and twists like discarded Saturn boosters on a narrative that ends up somewhere quite wonderful on its final touchdown. In the series of thrilling conceptual breakthroughs, one that can be safely given away is that Thwaites is terrific in the lead, for once here playing his actual age rather than the simpering adolescents he's unhappily become employable for affecting in Maleficent and The Giver. But it's Eubank's triumph, and confirms him as a curious young man with a very strange and interesting future ahead of him.



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